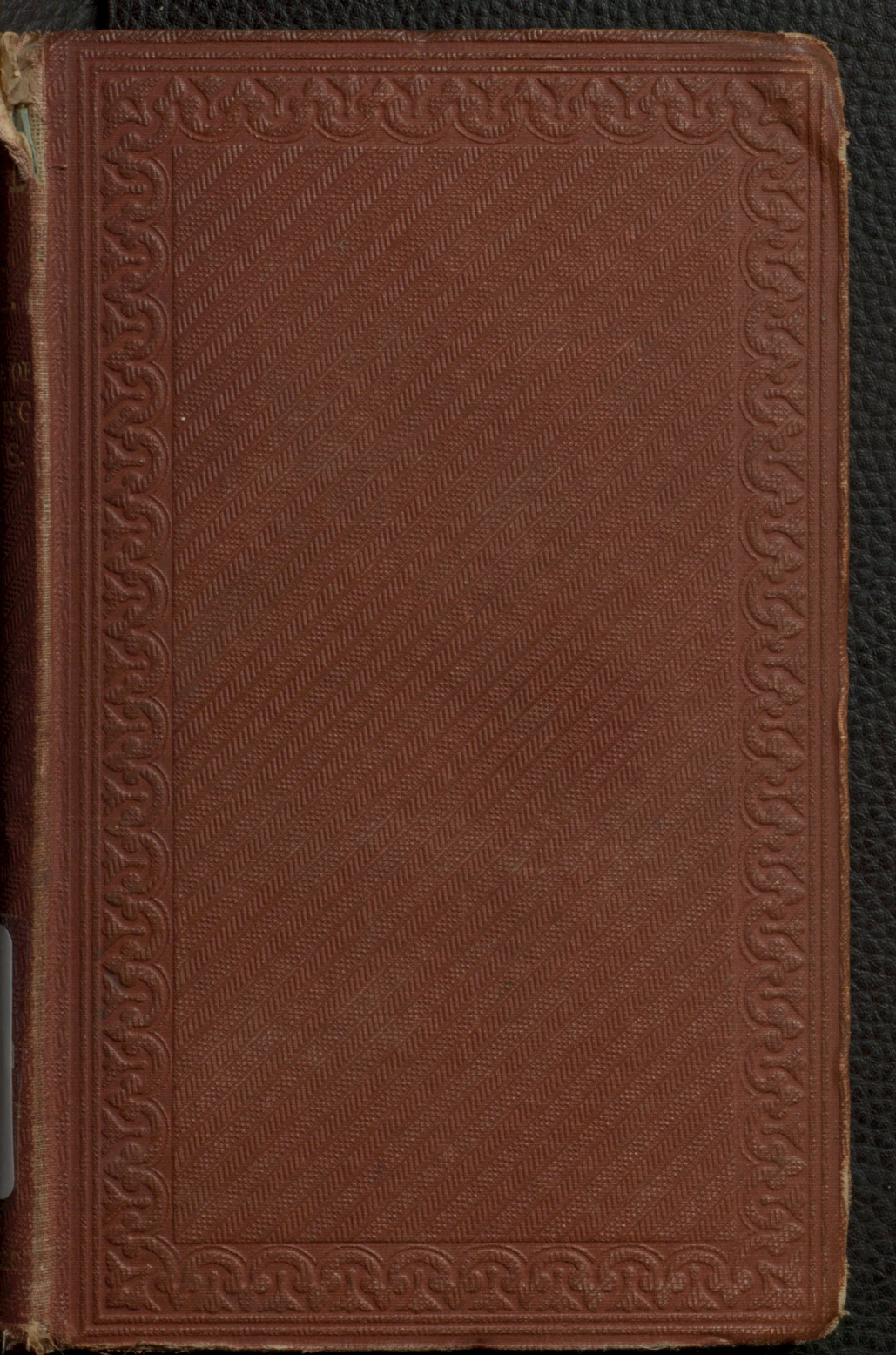




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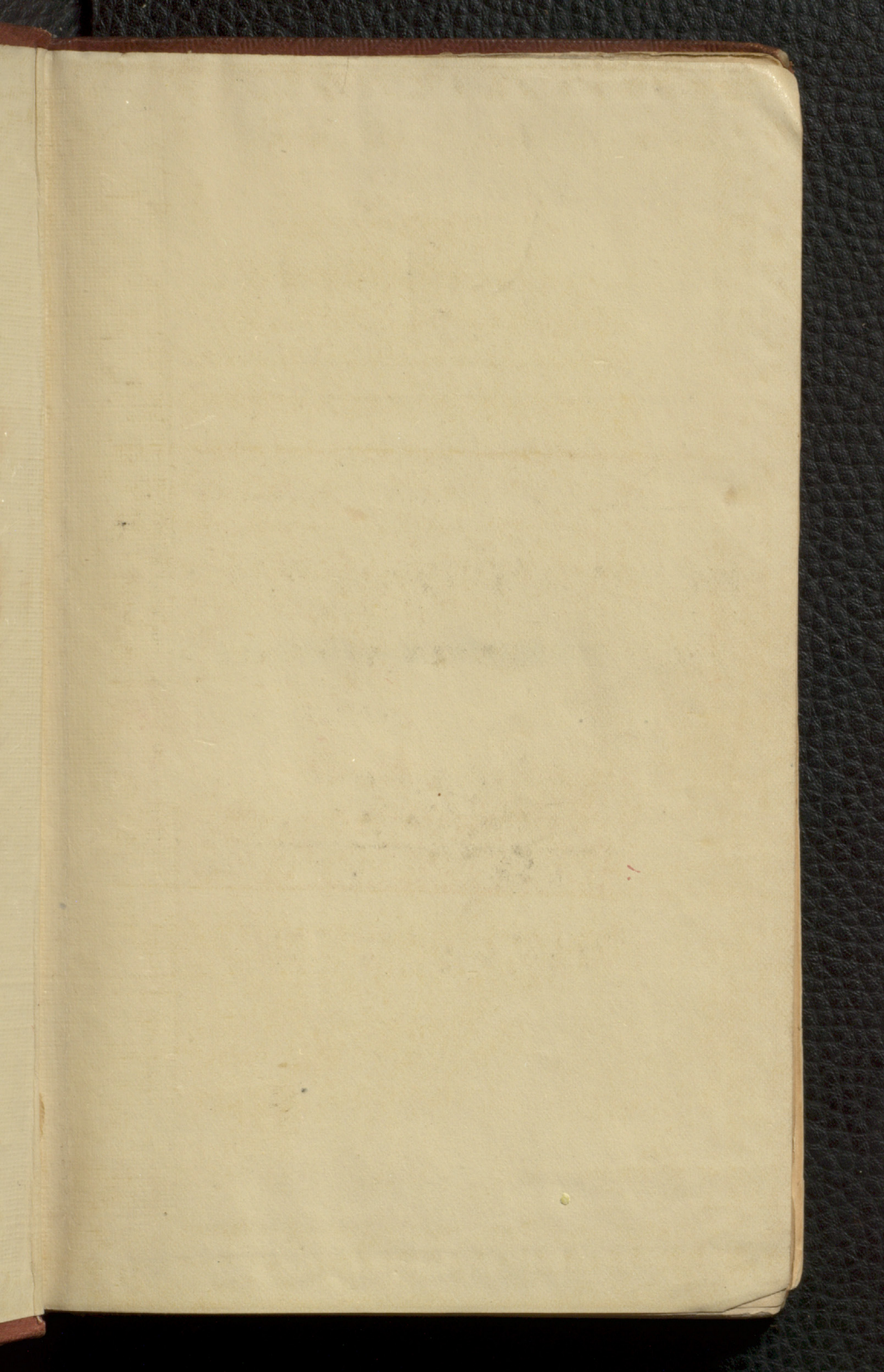


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VOL.

WANTED—A HOME.

WANTED - A HOME

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"MORN

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SMIT

WANTED—A HOME.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“MORNING CLOUDS,” “THE ROMANCE OF A DULL LIFE,”
ETC. ETC.

“Ho detto e lo ripeto, non ho scritto per tutti, anzi non ho scritto per più;
sibbene per quelli che davvero soffrono ed hanno sofferti.”—CESARE CANTÙ.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
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M.DCCC.LXIV.

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WANTED—A HOME.

CHAPTER I.

"There was a frightful cry,
As if the whole great earth were dead,
Yet was one arrow only sped,
One, only, called to die."

E. L. H., *Chambers' Journal*.

"WHAT can I tell?" writes the old chronicler;
"sharp death, that leaves neither powerful men
nor humble, took him."* When the rising sun
shone bright on the stately mansion of Fernwick,
he who had called it his own *was* not. That
dignified person who had maintained such inacces-

* *Anglo-Saxon Chronicler.*

sible reserve in the days of living strength, had suddenly changed his title and become "the body"—the dreadful "*it*" about which women whisper, and do ghastly business till the grave hides all its horrors, and the home from which it is taken knows it no more. His spirit had passed into another state, and people were gazing upon his forsaken body, trying to find out how death had entered it, and whether there had been much pain at the moment of dissolution. There was no trace of pain or of struggle; unfathomable calm had settled upon the body, and baffled every guess as to the feelings that might have prevailed when the living soul went forth. Death keeps its secrets inviolable.

With professional certainty Dr. Stephens pronounced it death from disease of the heart: it had been of long standing, and he had previously warned his patient that it *might* suddenly arrest the vital functions; but he had seen no reason to anticipate the melancholy event so soon; with

due care—which poor Mr. Raymond was not apt to neglect—he might reasonably have expected to reach advanced age. Had he been recently agitated in any considerable degree? any sudden fright? or peculiar pressure upon the mind in any way?

So the doctor questioned Mercy when for a few minutes she was able to leave her sister. No, she was not aware of anything weighing upon him particularly just lately; he was always loth to communicate anxieties, so she could not be sure. Her sister had spoken of increased gravity and seeming absence of mind, but knew no more of its cause than she herself. It might be well to ask Burton who was more frequently in and out of his master's room, if he had noticed anything unusual in his manner and occupation.

Burton answered with official fewness of words, and all the reticence of a good servant. He had “seen nothing out of the common. Poor master never said nothing to him when he went in;—

always wrote a sight of letters;—maybe a few more of late.” When he returned to the servants’ hall he observed that “times and times he had found him leaned over on one side with his hand pressed to the heart; and partiklar a day or two after that old rough Mr. Cunnick came in so sudden in December:” but this and a few more disjointed observations were only afforded to the curiosity of fellow-servants. He had for many years studied the art of polished impenetrability, and was not going to commit himself now.

The bailiff was more outspoken, and on Norman’s inquiry if he had seen any difference in Mr. Raymond during the many hours he had lately accompanied him about the park, he replied, “Uncommon short; hotter a deal than he was used to be; would crab me, a’ would, if I did but cross his words with reckoning quicker than he; bless your soul, sir! he was not like the same man, and would sigh as he went by the old trees which he had marked as if his soul was in ’em.

I used to say to Jim Long the keeper, the master don't know how to keep his high paces when he's ordering about them trees,—likely it goes hard with him about some'at, the quality can't always do what they would."

"Very strange!" said Mercy, who stood near, listening, "but Dr. Stephens was saying just now that his disease often caused extreme dejection and irritability."

The dreadful morning crawled heavily over her and Helen; how time went they hardly knew: everything so strangely the same, with one tremendous difference; the same shadows of the aspen tree dancing on the floor of Helen's room, (which she felt unable to leave,) just as they moved that time yesterday when the body was alive, with its fingers busy and its brain occupied with a hundred common trifles. The body—all they now had of a father on earth!

"Shall we go and see it, Mercy?" said her sister, when the house was quiet during the

servants' dinner. "I think I can bear it with you."

And they went into the presence chamber of death closely linked arm in arm; and moving noiselessly through its hushed dimness, stood together before their dead.

O mysterious and amazing gulf, impassable to the living, which separates the fondest hearts, and puts the most familiar friend at an awful and immeasurable distance! Who can say what we feel when we stand at its mortal brink, and can find in it nothing but an endless voiceless peace?

The keen outline of those tense features seemed to express a rapture of incommunicable surprise, but the eyelids close shutting out all earthly light, bespoke an ineffable quiet,—an abyss of rest, which no heart that beats in human body can ever hope to fathom.

His long day's work was done: the toiling spirit was gone home, and none knew what were its wages: loving and dutiful children did not

doubt, and tried to subdue something of their grief by thinking of his present bliss. But the past stung them. Seldom does the sightless corpse fail to be as an accuser to the conscience of the living. Its helplessness and cold desertion appeals to memory for more proof of kindness than can be recalled towards one whom man can help no longer, whom God has placed "safe from unkindness more,"* and when we can pain a fellow-creature no more, we generally begin to grieve that we have already pained him so much. The scant grey hair that lay upon their father's smoothed brow, witnessed to them pathetically of all the care and sorrow that had whitened it; had they ever been kind enough, pitying enough, considerate enough, of the parent who could no longer protect them? Affectionate children as they had always been, there was still ground for remorse, and on Helen it came most sharply.

* R. Browning.

"Come away, Mercy, it breaks my heart; his mouth looks so clenched and stern, I cannot look again."

And when they left the room it seemed strange to her to see their favourite dog, stretched as usual in the patch of sunshine opposite, under the main window of the gallery. But poor Mercy had to be busy: she would spare her sister all dismal arrangements, but she must go into them at once, with Norman's help; so she left Helen, lying half stupefied on the sofa of their morning-room.

A broken limb does not cause most pain just after the accident; and sudden bereavement dulls sensation with the shock of dread surprise. Helen lay there, thinking with an incoherence that was almost delirium; feeling little, except that her whole world had been turned upside down. The mind could hardly yet retain the conviction which her senses had brought it; and in one minute's course the ideas which usually occupied her followed up others totally and dreadfully new.

Had her father quietly walked in and asked her at what hour she wished to walk with him, it would not then have seemed strange; but only a happy demonstration of the wildness of this wretched dream. Yet that covered outstretched thing in its ghastly neatness at the further end of the gallery! Ah! *that* was real enough. But nature sank under the strain of excessive excitement, and soon she fell into a deep sleep which lasted several hours.

Meanwhile the two others relieved their feelings of grief, distress, and perplexity, by as large an expenditure of mourning paper and black wax, as three hours for writing "melancholy announcements" allowed. Later in the day, towards nightfall, when to excited nerves the sudden absence of one familiar face makes the hidden presence of death to be felt as if it were an awful entity, rather than a mere negation, Mercy persuaded her sister to come down-stairs. She sat for some time in the drawing-room tearless, and

amazed at her own seeming insensibility. Mercy was beside her, talking and weeping simultaneously; but she herself was too much stunned to feel anything acutely, and looked vaguely round the room, as if seeking for some outward confirmation of the latent woe and horror that was gradually coming within range of consciousness.

Norman's constitutional stolidity was of great service to her now. He looked so unalterably composed and thriving, and took such pains to get her coffee at the precise degree of strength that he thought advisable for an invalid, that for the moment he brought back some sense of stability in human affairs. His point of view was evidently quite unchanged by what had happened: and when at prayer time he read a chapter in the Bible with a loud unfaltering voice, and went through the usual evening prayer, emphasizing firmly and evenly the words which Helen had never heard before except from her father's lips, something of the reader's passionless devotion

seemed to steal over her, and she was able to say, Amen.

In the lowly homes all round Fernwick, people who had hitherto regarded Mr. Raymond with the gratified pride and servile awe of dependants, now spoke of him as an institution already broken up; —stripped him in their rough homely speech of all factitious honours, and summed up the characteristics of a nature until now the object of anxious interest with a few hard-hitting words.

“A good sort of man,” observed one old fellow to his wife, “but main positive, whether he set his will one way or t’other.”

“Ay, and te-art too when he was huffed; but a’ spoke and did kindly most ways. It’s the poor young ladies I think on. Miss Helen,—she’ll take on about it worst: t’other’s got a tidy mon to look arter her.”

And wherever two poor women met that day within a mile of the scene of mourning, low-voiced mention was made of omens, never noticed till the

fact had occurred of which they were taken as a sign; *tokens* of the oddest kind brought forth as posthumous proof that something "out of the common" was about to happen up at the house; and scarcely a cup of tea was drunk without those narratives of chilling interest, and that solemn gossip about death which our poor people so intensely enjoy. Well they may! it is, with few exceptions, *their* only approach to the sense of the sublime, sweet to all, though by few in any class sufficiently developed.

The dead man lay still in his cold dark room, and his children wept on their knees, till nature was exhausted, while their poor neighbours in going to rest, tasted all the mournful pleasure of strong pity and strong excitement, and were unconsciously elevated by experiencing that "one touch," and most of all that tremendous last touch of nature, "makes the whole world kin."

CHAPTER II.

“O Heaven, the world of duties left undone !
 The chill dark grave that closes over men
 Hath taught me many things I knew not then.
 Scarcely remains a memory within
 But, weighed and sifted, it reveals a sin.”

P. S. WORSLEY'S *Hades*.

WHEN morning light roused Helen the next day, she longed to be able to sink back again into the unconsciousness of sleep; for once awake, she knew that terrible grief was waiting to seize upon her, to strengthen itself with the strength of her own recruited faculties. A stunning blow had fallen upon her; and without one preliminary fear, she found herself crushed by sorrow of which she had often heard in the case of others with nothing more lively than intellectual sympathy;—with many a “poor thing!” exclamation, but

seldom a prayer to God for its relief. She needed the prayers of other people now, for her own spirit seemed paralyzed. It is not at first that sorrow softens; the secret irresistible sway of omnipotence breaks off the purposes, and scatters all the thoughts of man, but does not naturally bow the will; and when the Lord shows himself terrible in working, we suddenly perceive a fearful distance between what He is, and what our weak imaginings of Him have been. From having thought of God as the source of all our joys, and our defence against all evil, we come with quick recoil to regarding Him almost as an enemy. A sullen sense of injury and oppression takes the place of childlike confidence, and without intentional revolt, we feel "heavy and displeased," and unable to cast upon Him the burden with which He has overwhelmed us.

So Helen felt while her sister continued reading hymns to her before they went down to breakfast; and while Mr. Naseby, who called soon after it,

spoke to her of the duty of thankful resignation even now; of the loving Father in heaven of whom nothing in life or death could deprive her, and the blessed results of faithful submission. She listened meekly, with her outward ears, but not one word reached her heart; and when the clergyman left the room, fearing, by her silence, that he had wearied her by too many words, she sat motionless, staring at the carpet, and as little able to relieve her numbing grief by tears as by any manual employment. Mercy and Norman were doing all that had to be done, and did not want her; who did *now*? Poor creature! at that hour she felt as if she had lost her heavenly Father's love, as well as the presence of him who lay dead upstairs.

Then she looked round the room, the elegantly furnished drawing-room, with its pictures and books and knick-knacks inviting to pleasant occupation, and noticed all the interesting nothings of life with more than surprise, with

indignation and fear. How they seemed to cheat people! to have cheated herself into the carelessness from which sudden woe had hurled her! Baubles that had engaged her own and her poor father's attention even to the brink of death's awful precipice! How they persevered in representing this terrible mortal life as a smooth and graceful affair! How those newspapers lying at her side prated, as if comfort and peace were the inalienable blessings of those to whom their urgent advertisements appealed!

"Now in the press," such and such a book, in large type, stung her weakened heart. What did that, or all which *happy* people care so much about, matter? What could matter in a state which might any minute find itself side by side with death? How dared any one be happy? What strong opiate lulled their fears? What? Habit, custom, weakness of memory, all which would soon tell upon her with soothing persistence; but now the mind and all its powers were strained and

out of gear—nothing foreign to the one vast sorrow could hold her attention long, and she was such a novice in grief of this sort, that she mistook for an abiding impression the mood which a few unruffled weeks would change to something as far from happy, perhaps, but less incongruous with life as it usually appears.

As she sat in hopeless vacancy, her dog pushed aside the blind, letting in a strip of sunshine as it entered through the open window, and bustling up to her side, began with many winning antics to suggest, in dog language, that the time was come for their habitual morning walk.

“Not to-day, poor fellow! not now, down! poor dear Fluffy! Oh, Fluff!” she cried, stooping to put her arm round his fleecy neck, “I am so wretched!” and the dog, becoming aware of her emotion, kept still, and looked up with the wistful glance of ignorant sympathy. “Poor master, Fluffy, gone!”

Just then, as her head bent lower, she caught

sight of a little card-winder, lying under the table; it seemed a treasure trove, she seized it and kissed it so eagerly. The evening before the last, her father had taken some pains to shape it accurately for her, and yet she had actually let it drop after he had put it beside her work. It seemed strange, almost cruel now; and that touch of poignant remembrance broke the ice that had lain so heavily around every natural feeling.

When Mercy came into the room five minutes later, Helen was kneeling against the arm-chair, sobbing with hidden face, and Fluff standing close by, gently wagging his tail, and whining low, as if he made inquiry about the cause of her trouble.

"I came to tell you, dearest Helen, who we have asked for Saturday. Only Mr. and Mrs. Trouncer, and aunt Catherine and Richard besides Mr. Heathcote. Norman thought he ought not to be omitted, being such an old friend; and I knew you would like him rather than otherwise."

"Oh, yes! if any one must come—aunt

Catherine particularly I am glad you have asked."

"We shall have it as quiet as we possibly can, but you know *he* would have had such sad duties regularly and rightly done. For his sake we must let no one be pained by neglecting to show due civility."

"Did you write to Beatrice yesterday? I quite forgot to ask you."

"Yes, and to her aunt."

"How good you have been to spare me all that miserable work!"

Beatrice Chadleigh had that morning received the news of her friends' bereavement. She was at work in her flower-garden, preparing the ground for the hardiest annuals, when her husband brought out the black-bordered letter from Fernwick.

"How very sad! poor things! poor Mr. Raymond! How shocking! I wonder what will become of the girls. Helen must live with her

sister. Do you suppose Major Slade will sell out of the army and live at Fernwick with them? take care, my love! you are standing on my blue hepaticas. We must write to them at once of course: you must help me, dear, I hate having to write letters of condolence. But I want just to finish raking this border before I come in; the air is so charming to-day."

Thus, by a so-called friend, was that event spoken of which had filled one home with mourning, and almost broken one heart. For miles round Fernwick it had become the subject of remark in many a stranger's house. It was so sad, so startling a fact that people talked much of it. Kind-hearted Christians gave to the orphans a clause in their prayers, and often a few seconds' thought among all of a busier nature concerning interests and affairs that were present, and therefore more immediately pressing.

The will of the deceased having been found duly sealed in one of the first drawers that

Mercy opened in her father's bureau, it was thought unnecessary to disturb any of his papers before the day of the funeral. There was enough to sadden the intervening time without having to face such life-in-death remains. But letters addressed to him continued to arrive; and not a few seemed to his children so unintelligible that they were glad to wait for Mr. Heathcote's coming before they attempted to master their contents. "He knew more of my father's private affairs than any one else," Mercy would say, "unless it be that dreadful Mr. Cunnick—I wonder he does not write; he has had time since we let him know what has happened."

On the day fixed for the burial, Helen rose early after restless fevered sleep, and opened her windows while morning was half shrouded in night. A warm west wind stole in from the grey twilight: it was just stirring the soft fleece of lead-coloured clouds from the place of the sun-rising, and all the bare trees seemed to lift

their arms to catch its gentle blessing, softly swaying to and fro. The thrushes were singing their first spring notes in a glad chorus. "Quick-quick-quick." "Be quick! be quick!" was their cry from the park coppice and the laurel groves on the lawn, where, as she stood watching, she saw them move about with their hasty stooping run, busy in the early hours to find every worm which the stronger blackbird had neglected. What a time of year for shutting into the cold dark ground the body which had lately been an inlet for all the delights of earthly existence! *This* opening paradise of spring the weeping children saw; they had but the evidence of faith for their father's; feeble human nature pitied him as an exile, and could not yet rejoice with him as a released captive.

But the heavy black clothes were adjusted, and they must join the assembled party below—not a large one: Mrs. Lemayne had declined coming, pleading indisposition from a severe

cold as excuse; they had only four guests, but these were infliction enough to Helen. She felt irritated at the seeming pitilessness of external fact, at the unbroken routine of exterior comfort. It was still a fresh pang for her to see each daily habit bring round its usual claims. She almost wished that all should be at a stand in this heart-sickening time; and did not know that the regularity of household life, with its inevitable physical comforts and proprieties, was doing something, though very gradually, towards restoring composure of mind.

Sorrow made her splenetic, and she quite disliked seeing the letter-bag opened; the expressions of religious faith, which now recurred in every letter addressed to Mercy or herself, seemed empty of meaning. When we use them about other people, they often seem enough to make any mourner strong; when used about our own grief, alas! we assent long before we *feel* their truth.

This was Helen's case that morning as she pushed several letters across the table to her sister, while addressing herself to transact civilities with her aunt and Mr. Trouncer, whose mode of consolation had all the mournful accuracy of their dress,—with this difference, that Mrs. Trouncer seemed to elaborate noisy sighs at every long interval in conversation, and her husband to whisk off quick starting tears, with a sincere attempt to look as if he was only passing a handkerchief over his face.

Norman was glancing at his letters, and ejaculated, "One from Cunnick at last!" and the instant after "whew!" with a long emphatic expiration. His wife's eager surprise, Helen's questions, Mrs. Trouncer's guesses, drew from him no explanation. He at once pocketed the letter, and said it was about nothing that signified to-day. But when the last duties, as we say, to his late father-in-law were performed, and the will was being formally read in the library, all

being present, the startling letter had to be produced; it made Mr. Raymond's last will and testament so much waste paper; for he was a ruined man, and all his fine estate deeply mortgaged.

Mr. Cunnick wrote from abroad, whither he had hastened to escape from creditors. He had some years previously inveigled Mr. Raymond into mining speculations of enormous profit, *if* they weathered enormous risk. When things began to look unfavourable, he urged and lured him on to hazard more, assuring him of ultimate compensation. The truth was, that he was himself living upon the credit of his wealthy co-partner, whom he at once blinded by flattery of what he called his fine intellect, and insulted by the coolness with which he induced him to submit to petty villanies. Of such acquiescence in vice, he would have been quite incapable, had not the fear of desperate loss, and disgraceful exposure, made him a coward and self-deceiver. They were

partners in hope and in secrecy. Had not Mr. Cunnick been an entirely coarse-minded man, and Mr. Raymond constantly dependent upon him for details of business, such fellowship would have been impossible, and the base transactions of the swindler could not have happened for want of capital to begin upon. As it was, the prosperous vulgarity of the one gave substance and a kind of prudential sanction to the imaginative desires of the other; who, nevertheless, always promised himself that he would "have done with the fellow" when once his fortunes were repaired so far as to leave his estates clear of encumbrance. He had done with earthly life first; the bubble of unjust gain had suddenly broken, and so he left his children an inheritance of total ruin.

CHAPTER III.

"Fortunati del mondo, se tutto questo racconto non fa per voi, meno ancora questo capitolo, che versa tutto fra solitari patimenti cui non potreste capire. Ma chi soffre, chi ha sofferto, gli intenderà, gli compatirà."

Margherita Pusterla.

It took some hours for the gentlemen of the party to come to any conception of the amount of liabilities which their deceased friend had incurred. Mr. Heathcote undertook to break the dismaying intelligence to Helen, who, with her sister and aunt, had been requested to leave the room before the long examination of business papers was begun. He found her alone in the twilight, dressed for dinner, the other ladies not yet come

down; and when he saw her beautiful face placid with hardwon composure, and heard the attempted cheerfulness of her voice, as she said,—“I thought you were all gone to sleep in the other room,”—he felt as if it was impossible to make an announcement of new sorrows, and began to speak of trifles.

“How lovely that white hyacinth looks, my dear, in your flower-stand; it should be called the ‘Helen Raymond!’ and *so* sweet!”

She turned a languid eye upon the crowded stalk, and felt a sort of wonder that its spotless bells could have been opening and perfecting beauty during the last few days. Involuntarily we look for sympathy in nature, and find it strange that anything can go on as usual when peace is banished from our lives.

“I quite dread the spring flowers, Mr. Heathcote, this year—what is the matter? You look so frightened and ill. I see—you have been overtiring yourself, and must have a glass of wine

without waiting for dinner;" and she crossed the room to ring the bell.

But Mr. Heathcote stopped her, and drawing her gently to the sofa, asked her if she could trust Almighty God for her future needs, whatever they might be.

"I know," he said, "that you are truly resigned to the dreadful loss you have sustained, but, my dear child, supposing that God called you to further trial of your faith——"

At this juncture Mrs. Trouncer entered the room, exclaiming,—

"To think that it should ever come to this! I *can't* believe it;—it's all a mistake;—tell me it is; I *must* be satisfied without delay. Reassure me quickly, Mr. Heathcote, I *entreat* you—Trouncer has been telling me——"

"My dear madam! for pity's sake, keep silence, I conjure you; restrain yourself for the sake of this poor young lady — she has not heard——"

"What is it? oh, tell me!" cried Helen, too much agitated to settle her alarmed fancy on any one definite apprehension, and therefore instantaneously imagining a wild variety of horrors.

"Only that you are utterly ruined—penniless orphans," replied her aunt, flinging her stout person on the opposite sofa, and shutting her eyes, as if making herself ready to faint; but it was Helen who would have fallen, quite unconscious, had not Mr. Heathcote been at her side. If a glance could commit manslaughter, his would have ended the career of Mrs. Trouncer at that moment. Norman and Mercy came in just as he was supporting Helen's head, and, with their help, she was soon lying down and restored to consciousness.

"I'm sure, my dear, it was best to break it to you at once," said Mrs. Trouncer, after much noisy movement about the sofa, with undesired salts-bottles, and wine that could not be swallowed.

"Trouncer tried to prepare me, as he called it; and it was as bad as having a tooth lanced before it is drawn: *don't give way again!*" (Helen had only turned from one side to the other to hear what the loud voice meant; for she still felt in a dream.) "There, now! you see she's coming round, Mr. Heathcote; you need not mistrust *my* prudence at such times again. *I* know enough of nervousness, I'm sure."

"Not if you will go now to dinner, dear aunt," interposed Mercy; "she only needs quiet—pray go in. Thank you, Mr. Heathcote, Norman will bring me some dinner by-and-by; I only want to be alone with her now."

And they were left alone. Kneeling beside her, Mercy knew how to soften the rigidity of new terrors, and to sweeten sorrow with the tenderest love. She did not speak of the disclosures, which, with Mrs. Trouncer in the house, it was impossible to try to conceal for another hour; she spoke of the Paradise of God, and the might of a compassionate

Saviour; of those other eternal certainties which bring all transitory things to seeming insignificance, so long as the mind is fastened upon truths it *cannot* at all times feel. Helen felt then more aware of Heavenly love than of overwhelming griefs, and by-and-by she was able to go to her own room, and there sank into calmest sleep before her sister would rejoin the others.

It was well that this retreat had been effected before their aunt came back to the drawing-room; for dinner seemed to have redoubled her energy for lamentation and cruelly explicit condolence. She sat opposite Mercy with folded hands, slowly jogging herself to and fro, with eyes upcast, and mouth drawn down, only ejaculating at close periods such dismal thoughts as struck her most forcibly; not heeding that submissive silence was all that her niece could aim at now, without a complete overthrow of spirits.

"Of course you must leave the place! No two opinions about *that*. SAD! after so many generations of Raymonds have held it." A pause, and pinching of the lips as this drew no reply. "You will have to sell it to some *parvenu*, I dare say—one of the cotton lords your poor father used to dislike so much! Ah! if he had known. It must be *very* distressing to you, my love, but I think Helen is almost *more* to be pitied——"

"We will not talk of this now, aunt, if you please. I must make tea for our poor tired gentlemen, and be as cheerful as I can, for their sake: there goes the door of the dining-room; they will be in directly."

"Ah, well! if you can remain callous at such a time, of course I ought not to complain. I envy some people's nerves. For myself, as I said to Trouncer just now, it's no use going to bed, for I shall not sleep: why, my love, only think of what has to be *done* now; it's a case that calls for instant action, urgently; instant retrenchments.

However little you may feel your deplorable position, you must see——”

“Oh, Norman, how welcome your nice old face is!” said Mercy, as just then her husband entered, with the other gentlemen, and came up to her. “Helen is asleep, and I’m only a little tired, thank you; in fact, not at all, now you are come. Pray give aunt her tea, and say something quieting to her if you can.”

“I trust that your sister is in some degree recovered,” said Richard Lemayne, taking his place beside her at the tea-table; “the shock must have been very severe.”

“Poor child!” ejaculated Mr. Heathcote, who came in last, “I was quite thankful to hear from Burton that she had fallen asleep. Indeed, Mrs. Slade, I was to blame for giving any one time to inflict such a shock; but her meekness made me cowardly. I could have told you, with that fine fellow there to keep up your spirits, but our sweet Nelly looked so broken down with

patience, that I had to cast about for words before I *could* tell her that she had still more to bear."

"Thank you. I'm sure you did your kindest. Perhaps it was best as it was; some things nothing *can* prepare us for—for what has happened this day week, nothing——"

Mercy's voice broke down, but she continued to busy herself nervously with cups and saucers; anxious to spare her husband any apprehension of an emotional scene, to which he was particularly averse, both from genuine kindness of heart, and total incapacity for saying the right thing when other people are pronounced "upset." As scarcely anything in life ever disturbed his own equanimity, he really could not guess how to relieve "upset" feelings. His fashion was to leave his good-natured eyes two or three seconds upon the face of sufferers, and then to ask if there was anything they wanted; if that failed to extract a clue for his enlightenment, and if he could *do* nothing to help

them, he took refuge in the generalizations of proverbial wisdom and indisputable piety; and as Mercy used to say, he would be the very worst husband to try to act upon by force of fits or fainting, for he never was too much alarmed to splash people with cold water, or silence them with wise sayings; and would, on the other hand, do anything and everything to help another person, so long as he or she behaved reasonably.

But at the present moment he was engaged, listening with an unmoved countenance to Mrs. Trouncer, who expatiated, under her breath, on the boundless misery involved in to-day's disclosure.

"Won't you have some more tea?" was all he said when she had done.

Mr. Trouncer had drawn Mr. Heathcote aside, and they were in deep consultation; so that Mercy had Richard on her hands unassisted, and hard work she found it to support his weak trickling talk about diocesan meetings, and synodical

action, and the original intention of the early Church with regard to the diaconate. Since he judged it right to avoid painful subjects, he naturally pitched on those most agreeable to his own tastes; but one confidential word about Arthur would have been worth all this ecclesiastical small talk. By close questioning, Mercy did find out that Arthur was at the Bendigo diggings, and had been successful hitherto. That was something to brighten Helen's eye with; but no feminine art could induce him to commit himself by giving any hint of the state of his brother's feelings; and, probably, he knew no more of them than she did. He was not deficient in good feeling, but he lacked moral courage for letting what he had appear, and was, consequently, formal when he might have been affectionate, and cold when heartiness would have been more suitable.

So passed the evening of the funeral-day—as such days do pass. In spite of all the con-

vulsions of grief and dismay within, the exterior of civilized life remains tolerably smooth and unbroken; its comfortable habits bound together by routine, and unable, even in utmost despair, to break loose from conventional trammels.

CHAPTER IV.

“Genöthigt das zu empfinden, was Jeder von uns tausendmal empfunden hat ; dass der Mensch mit seinem herbsten Leid einsam zwischen der Menschen ist.”—HAHN HAHN's *Jenseit der Berge*.

FATE seems to delight in cumulative evidence either of the happiness or misfortune of human beings. In words more strictly true, it may be affirmed that when the Lord begins to chasten man, the strokes of his loving correction are very often repeated in quick succession—even till his servants wonder whether more sorrow can be borne. Without doubt the afflictions that thus follow upon one another are often *less* severely felt than they would have been if separated by longer

intervals of peace. So small is the capacity of human nature for retaining any violent feelings, that after a certain pitch of emotion, it can respond no longer to new excitements. It is so deadened and crushed that the mental eye desists from trying to measure its woe, and the heart, tranquilized by despair, can only feel, as to the future—"Let come on me what may."

The morning after the funeral, Norman Slade heard that his regiment was ordered to China. At first he was told that it was to leave England in three weeks' time; a day or two later, a reprieve was granted. There had been some change of purpose, and now the first week in April was named for the time of departure. The perplexity and sorrow of those few days shall not be described, because their main transactions took place in the unseen world of spiritual life, which admits of no verbal delineation. When we read of such trouble as this in a book, however lifelike the description, however vivid the language, we

cannot feel anything of the consternation such a state of things produces. In any narrative we have a framework, a proportion, a superintending sense of ultimate issue to less darkened scenes: the very shape into which a narrative throws sorrow, gives it compactness and harmony, but at the time—on the bewildered spot—*all* is dread. Though faith may hold firm its hope in God's mercy, fact impresses with irresistible vehemence the new lesson that mercy is shrouded in thickest clouds; and having seen what Divine love *has* permitted already, the sufferers do not know what further enhancement of grief it may still require them to endure.

At this time there was at Fernwick so much to agitate, afflict, and dismay, that Helen began to yield to a kind of torpor. Before the funeral party was broken up she kept as much as she could with those who were talking: she lingered beside any group of eager speakers, hoping that the current of feeling around her might in some way

carry forward her own grief-obstructed thoughts. But the stream flowed on beside her great misery, and left it unrelieved and fixed. She talked too sometimes, trying to silence her heart by external vivacity. Mercy now and then wondered that in such a dreadful crush of business as now beset them, her sister could waste the time she did, seemingly in idle chat with Mr. Heathcote: *she* had not the heart for it. But she had a store of joy which made *her* able to be alone without that overwhelming consciousness of utter desolation from which Helen shrunk. Mercy felt their bereavement bitterly, but not half so afflictively did it affect her—how could it, when with every sight and sound there was a secret association of intense happiness still remaining to her, which stole out to view in opposition to all the wrecking sorrow of the time, and allured her to dreams of a happy future with the husband she so ardently loved?

What had Helen by way of an horizon? Blank

uncertainty. Dr. Stephens had authoritatively pronounced against any idea of her going out to China with the Slades. The voyage alone, he asserted, with accurate knowledge of her delicate constitution, would be her death, and was not to be thought of. And she felt a little aggrieved by her sister's quiet acceptance of the prohibition: she had spoken of it with regret, but in a kind of business-like tone (Helen fancied), as if the loss would be all on *her* side—and without a tear; while she herself was half suffocated by the suppression of choking sobs when she first understood her doom. But tears are not in real life so seasonable in their appearance as in story-books: very often they have for their natural substitutes looks of hard composure, and even ill-tempered words. They come when they *must*, and then uncontrollably; not when they are expected, or due, or intelligible. Besides this, when grief is excessive, the sympathy of by-standers is overpowered, and feels faint and cold with helplessness.

Need of comfort that can be more easily met infuses strength by giving the comforter a sense of power; but when the sorrowful heart is evidently inconsolable, it comes to this, "and they of mine acquaintance were afraid of me." Hence the inexpressible solitude of woe.

Helen did not for a moment accuse her sister of unkindness, but she felt that she was pre-occupied either by Norman or business matters, and could not guess the degree of wretchedness going on at her side.

Poor Mercy! she might indeed be excused—for Mrs. Trouncer kept all her energies at full stretch. At a time of pressure upon every nerve, when the mere process of washing her hands was an interval of peaceful leisure; her aunt would waylay her whenever she could find her for a minute alone, to make long and harsh-voiced harangues on all she thought was going on amiss in the saddened household. When Mercy silenced these with a little dignified petulance, making her

feel that this was not her province for reform, she would take another tack still more annoying, and continue to moot preposterous schemes with an ardour that gave to their absurdity just enough colouring of expedience to torment Helen's imagination with vague and boundless fears. It was in vain that Mercy made her see the futility of discussing plans till Mr. Trouncer and Mr. Heathcote had got more light upon legal and financial possibilities. "Such nonsense!" she would ejaculate to her sister, while hastening about the drawing-room, making out her catalogue of furniture, "such folly to be troubling about that before we have the least idea of what can be saved from the wreck."

But as soon as she had left the room, Mrs. Trouncer would bustle in, and begging Helen to lay aside her list-copying for an instant, go on to worry her for an hour about some impracticable scheme for making a loan and saving Fernwick.

Richard Lemayne had left, Norman was busy

helping his wife, and the two other gentlemen closeted all day over letters, accounts, and legal documents. At length it was beyond question that Fernwick must be quickly vacated, the establishment broken up, the estate and everything upon it sold. Eager hurried hands were now busied from morning till night in clearing the house: every trace of its occupants for so many years was to be summarily removed.

As the sad work went on, Helen and Mercy were continually arrested by the visions it called up. In every room, in every desk and drawer, they came across the drift of finished days—drift which lodges like the dead leaves of former years in all corners of a home, and speaks so pathetically of the purposes and deeds of the life that is cut off. Here a careful plan for some improvement in the farm-buildings; there a list of memoranda for business which Mr. Raymond had intended to carry out this next March. *Next!* ah! *it* was present, and not he; and all business, pleasure,

hope, enterprise, were being swept to a grave as oblivious as his own. While he lived a thousand little delicacies, weaknesses, and fears (apart from *the great anxiety*) had veiled his thoughts from his children; but death had torn away the veil, and he was for ever inaccessible. Much that had keenly interested the reserved man was to his daughters wanting in meaning; papers, letters, plans to which they had no key, and could give no kind of explanation, were, after a careful sorting, and consulting by Mr. Heathcote of a lawyer their father had sometimes employed in the town nearest to them, condemned to be burned. Helen would stand and lean over the hearth, and see the heap shrivel and sigh in the flames with a fierce throb of despair, which was not without enjoyment.

And while this went on, it was the time of year when every cottage had its little treasure of spring happiness in cup or wine-glass full of primroses and violets: when flowers lay on the floor where-ever children played, and little fingers were

plucking under the hedges as soon as school was over. Helen thought of all this as the evenings lengthened, and the sweet twilight hours seemed to pause over the folded daisies and swelling buds all round; but neither she nor her sister could make an unnecessary break under the stress of mournful toil; not even to sit still by the window and drink in balmy air. One day, among all the hideous disorders of a room which was being ransacked before it was forsaken, Helen saw a fresh bunch of primroses which Norman had brought in and laid upon the dusty table of the library. The crisp leaves showed their downy sides against the grim background of piled books, placed ready for an auctioneer to pack, and some of the delicate blossoms had slipped down, and lay on the catalogues and packing paper which strewed the floor beneath. What a vision of strange beauty it was! what a new sensation of returning pleasure it caused! For the first time since the real business of clearing had begun, she burst into tears, and

wept long and softly, till the load at her heart was almost lightened.

She was called from that rare luxury of self-indulgence to see Miss Ashcroft, who was in the drawing-room, making her first call. She had hastened to pay her visit as soon as she had judged it likely to be acceptable; but, very naturally, when she got to the house of mourning she was thinking more of how her manner and words could do justice to *her* feelings for her poor friends, than of what *theirs* then were, and this did not enable her to give them much comfort.

Neither was this at all in her power to give; she had, as it were, a little abstract sympathy always warming on the hob, and could pour out some, cold-boiled and tasteless as it was, on the first occasion that seemed to call for it. But this does little for half-broken hearts, so that when Mercy and Helen had both asked after Beatrice, and all regulation speeches had been made, the finished

monument of social sculpture began to feel ill at ease, and was glad to rise soon, and take leave, affectionately refusing to intrude any longer upon their troubled hours.

She was not the only caller that sad week; many people with whom they had had but slight acquaintance before now sued for opportunity of friendly service, with a delicacy and fervour of kindness which showed how strongly they interested themselves in the fate of a ruined family; and others who had been kept at arm's length by the wholesome awe of common minds for those who live in a great house, and are reckoned among the "county families," now felt emboldened and ventured on more assuming advances. Mercy and Helen first knew how changed their social position was by the condoling familiarities of a brewer's wife, and the increased affability and chattiness of their attorney's daughters,—familiarities soon repressed by the unconscious dignity and grace of the orphans, but none the less felt. Though they

recognized the kindness intended, they saw in it the measure of their fall.

"Insolent *I* should call them!" exclaimed their angry aunt, as the last party of visitors withdrew; "these under-bred people always take advantage of a downfall."

It struck both the sisters that her mode of rebuking assumption—talking big about the past, and bewailing her poor brother's ill-requited liberalities, was more ill-bred than the Miss Fleshers' unwelcomed experiment of kissing; but not being used themselves to the vulgar amusement of ridiculing other people, they noticed many a little flaw in their aunt's deportment, many an absurd dissonance between her profession and her sentiments, with a veiled eye, not saying anything about it, even to one another.

She was one of those thoroughly warm-hearted women whom it was impossible to be vexed with long at a time, and yet who extremely vexed them twenty times a day. If one could laugh at the

shame and discomfiture of poor human nature, one might be amused at the odd effect of selfish people suddenly trying to bring to bear upon a temporary claimant of sympathy, all the thoughtful kindness which *only* real unselfishness can produce. The attempt is whimsically vain. The face is strained into a compassionate attitude, but no felt compassion is there: the voice softened, but no tenderness can be got into it; and both the pitiers and the pitied are aware of this, though neither betray consciousness of the blank.

After her fashion Mrs. Trouncer was acting with great kindness, and when at times of excessive provocation, Mercy would hastily ejaculate that she wished aunt Trouncer was well out of the way, she did not know how much of personal sacrifice it cost her aunt to remain with them; how she was longing to be at home again, and telling Mr. Trouncer, whenever she could catch his attention in private, what a number of things would be all going wrong in her absence:

Penelope's mourning made with no tucks in preparation for her growth, and Marmaduke's hat improperly trimmed. It was the thought of home troubles like these which gave rather a stormy character to Mrs. Trouncer's demeanour, though from kindness she allowed no personal regret to escape her when lamenting the protracted sorrow of uprooting for her poor nieces. Angry nature found its vent, notwithstanding, in other ways.

One morning she found Mercy and Helen reading a long letter from Mrs. Lemayne. Her eyes inquired what it was all about; Mrs. Lemayne seldom wrote at length to HER; (in early days they had been friends, and now *what* an accent of ill-temper she laid upon her last word!) Mercy gave her the letter to read as one which she found full of comfort. It was both consolatory and didactic. The heart long tried in the furnace of affliction went forth to embrace those who now entered it—as she presumed—for the first time.

Mrs. Lemayne said much of God's mercy in afflicting, but more of the sinfulness which called down such chastisement; on the sin of pride she enlarged more particularly; (it gratified something not quite sinless in herself to do so;) and she ended by earnest exhortations to the improvement of this due time of trouble, in prayer and meditation and self-questioning thought.

"Do not, I entreat you, my dear nieces, allow the distractions of sorrowful business to follow hard upon the distractions of worldly pleasure; but consecrate an interval of time by those solemn thoughts and feelings to which the hand of God so evidently tries to lead you. Let no business now come before your attention to the one thing needful."

There was something in the tone of this letter which Helen felt inapposite; but as Mercy called it so excellent and consoling, she suppressed her objections, and thought that they probably arose from pride also.

“*Well!*” cried Mrs. Trouncer, when she had finished reading the letter, “people have different tastes, *of course*. Catherine’s high-flown notions always used to put *me* out of all patience; to hear her talk one would think there was nothing in life to look after but people’s souls. I suppose they would not have been put into bodies at all, if the Lord did not mean these to be looked after too!”

Mrs. Trouncer meant to be *very* kind, but good intentions cannot suspend an habitual turn of character. “That belonged to my poor dear mother; and if all had their rights it would be mine,” she would say, fixing a regretful eye on a pepper-caster or inkstand, and toning her harsh voice to as much reproachfulness of accent as could consist with affection for the dead. Thus drawing out energetic requests from both her nieces that she would appropriate everything that she considered her own, before the catalogues were made out. But this Mrs. Trouncer had no idea of

doing, she only wished to keep open a wound—a place to which her selfish sensibility could recur at any time that it needed stimulants to complaint. Her manner altogether was more as if her brother's death had been a grievance directed at herself than a loss to orphan children; and if her tones had been literally construed they would have expressed that she thought him very inconsiderate for dying so suddenly.

CHAPTER V.

"What a vast wilderness the world becomes when man has no home."—FREDERICK PERTHES.

THE question was yet unanswered, what *can* poor Helen do? It was a theme for long perplexed discussions. Mercy could not offer to stay in England with her; aunt Catherine said not a word about invitation, even for a time; the Trouncers lifted their eyebrows and called it a grave embarrassment; and Mr. Heathcote only reiterated that there could never be much difficulty in finding a home for such a charming creature. This, together with his knowing smiles, whenever the subject was mooted, led Mercy to guess that if nothing more desirable was planned, he would certainly like her to live with him, and might

contrive in his spacious house to receive some elder relation of his own also, by way of chaperone. She communicated the idea to her sister, and found it welcome. Helen thought it a likely and rather pleasant plan.

“You know, Mercy, how much I dislike a town, but London is the best place, if one must be out of the country. I really believe I could be happier with him than anywhere else—away from you. He will let me have plenty of flowers from Covent Garden, and why should I not take our aviary to his yard—you remember, behind the house, looking out on the mews; it would be nasty and smoky, of course, but still better than seeing only those grimy London sparrows near the house.”

An hour or two later, when walking with Mr. Heathcote in the garden before luncheon, she frankly suggested the possibility that had occurred to herself and her sister. Since he so often complained of lonely old age, would he let her in as

housekeeper; and if she came, might she bring the birds, and poor Fluffy too?"

Mr. Heathcote cleared his throat several times, drew up his grey head—an odd little smirk on his kind face, and replied,—

"*Gently*, my dear girl, gently: you must not be surprised—I mean that we must not make too sure of *that* plan; it could at best be but a temporary arrangement. Nothing would give *me* more pleasure, and I feel much gratified by your wishes; but—to tell the truth, I am hardly in a position——

"Why not?" said Helen, with the point blank emphasis of sudden disappointment."

"Well, my dear Helen, you must know that bears upon a most interesting point; there is a lady in the case."

"Have you a sister coming to live with you, then, and would she mind me?" inquired Helen, whose ignorant youth was blinded by age and its wrinkles to any other probability.

An awkward laugh, a prolonged nose blowing, a little cough, and the disclosure was made.

"I am preparing my house for a young bride."

"Dear me!" Helen ejaculated; and then sorry to have shown any surprise, she said more softly, "I hope you will be happy."

Mr. Heathcote was blushing up to the roots of his white hair when they were beckoned in to luncheon. "What, then, is to become of me!" thought his dismayed companion, as she took her place at the table, and gave herself up to all the small talk she could elaborate. She thought of Miss Ashcroft, but delicacy forbade any betrayal of her forlorn position in that quarter, of Beatrice, whose letters usually ended with some general and indefinite terms of invitation; but not only had these been omitted since she knew of Helen's loss, but as Mercy once said, "Beatrice Chadleigh had about as much feeling as the winged women who hide their faces outside mourning-pin boxes;" and though *she* would not tell Charles that Helen was

virtually homeless, (she had too much of world's wisdom for such indiscretion now,) she would be a most impossible associate in a time of grief like this.

The following morning a letter was received from Miss Duckett, the Raymonds' old governess, most kindly offering Helen a room in her school-house, and permanent home there, if her dear young friend could bring herself to take any part in teaching Italian and music. She also suggested that Helen might do worse than prepare herself for taking the situation of a governess: it was a sad thing to propose, but when other means of support were taken away, Providence seemed to require a complete sacrifice of self-pleasing; and this appeared the only possible way of winning independence. This was the drift of the good old lady's advice: it was couched in the kindest and most delicate terms. But it gave great offence—to Mrs. Trouncer and Mercy at least; poor Helen felt too much cast down to be able to fall lower, and declared

herself ready and willing to do anything other people thought right.

“The idea of *your* being a wretched governess! She must be demented to think of such a thing, Helen; aunt Trouncer is quite right when she says that long habits of authority make people apt to presume. Only conceive what our dear father would have said to the notion of his beauty taking a situation!”

“One cannot conceive what he would think of anything now going on,” replied Helen.

“As long as *I* live I won’t consent to such a thing, my dear, so think no more about it; I would beg before I would see you degrade yourself.”

Mrs. Trouncer came in at this juncture with a considerable rush of petticoat and weight of tread; tears were in her eyes, and her voice shook, while breaking to her nieces the resolution she had just come to with Mr. Trouncer.

“Let us consider Helen as our own child, and

let her live with us till she marries," said I to my dear husband; and he—you know what a heart Trouncer has—he replies, 'My love, I shall like anything that pleases you; and Helen shall be most welcome to every comfort our house affords.'

An impassioned wiping of her eyes, and then a turn of loud kissing, followed upon this announcement. Both sisters felt the exceeding kindness of the offer, but they were a little "taken aback," and could not quite keep pace with the gratitude of their feelings. Helen looked at Mercy anxiously, to see if she approved the plan; but Mercy was under her aunt's eye, and could only look pleased.

"You are very kind," she said, "and I really feel your kindness as gratefully as Helen can, for it has been a sore perplexity to know what to do—but, indeed——"

"No, my dear, I cannot suffer any *but* in the case; we *had* thought of it before; but this out-

rageous proposal of Miss Duckett's brought me to a decision, and *my* decisions, as Trouncer says, are generally final. So now, my dear Helen, pray consider yourself as one of our daughters, and be in no kind of anxiety about the future. If I am at all a good prophet, we shall not be able to keep you many years among us. I will just step and tell Trouncer that you make no objection."

Oh! but her heart made so much; it had an outcry, which it longed to utter when she was invited to consider herself as a daughter; and she longed passionately to say, "No, no, never that, anything but that!" But, again at this crisis, Mercy's habitual determination swayed her will, and gainsayed her keener perceptions.

Talking over the scheme alone, her sister persuaded her that, with all its disagreeables, it was the best, nay, the only thing, to do; that there was no alternative for her; and that this would be probably only a temporary measure; either

she would marry—(Helen's whole being winced at that saying), or Norman might be ordered home, and then she would live with them. For the present she must yield to their aunt's kind wish, and make the best of the offered refuge.

And so Helen's doom was fixed, at a time when she was too spiritless and disconsolate to make any firm resistance. Indeed, had she been able to resist, her obvious destitution of resource might have driven her to acquiescence.

Mr. Heathcote was told of the new plan, with a faint wild hope, that by some inspiration of inventive kindness, he might be able to hinder its execution; but he heard of it with satisfaction, applauding it as the best thing she could do. There would be trial, he allowed; but then, what position could afford immunity from this? Besides, it was but for a time. With such truisms, people easily console themselves when accepting a dismal prospect for some one else. Mr. Heathcote was anything but a selfish man;

but, having given to his poor friends his best legal advice, gratis, and fifty pounds to Helen for her immediate necessities, he felt as if he owed it to himself to get quit of such an unpleasant, anxious subject, as a homeless orphan. In fact, he was running short of patience, and wished to wash his hands of a painful business, and be off to decide which should be his wedding-day. Helen perceived his wishes, and with the languid thanks of hopelessness, begged him to make no longer stay on her account.

When Norman was told of her intention of living with the Trouncers, he began to whistle; and when chidden by his wife for so doing, and pressed to say what he thought of the plan, he would only repeat, "Pon my honour, I don't know."

Mr. Trouncer began to be restive under delay of business, and his wife, too, thought it better, if her dear nieces *could* spare her, to return with him, and see that all was ready for Helen, though

she had arranged not to go there till the middle of May; wishing to stay with some other friends in the intervening month.

Selfishness is so generally veiled, and padded, and disguised for social appearance, that when first a crisis of trial allows it to appear before us bare and unadorned it is always—in spite of our own hearts—a shocking surprise. Helen felt this, but so much proof of real kindness had been given, that she could not say it. A miserable heart is always exorbitant in its claims upon happier beings; or, at least, *they* think so. Perhaps Mercy had spoiled her, and raised her expectations of kind treatment to an inordinate pitch. Her charity amounted to the effect of genius in the perspicuity and loftiness of mind which it gave. She really looked into the needs and sorrows of her companions as closely as most people do into their own, and thus *felt* their grief, and did not only call it “very unfortunate.” She perceived the prostration of her

sister's spirits, and at once accommodated even her ideas of duty to its relief.

"Norman," she said, "you can spare me now better than Helen; give me leave to stay here another fortnight, and while you make ready for our starting, I will try and help here."

Perhaps few wives would have thought this duty: she did, and Norman agreed with her. What it cost her or him to separate so long, she simply set aside as having nothing to do with the matter.

That fortnight was like a prolonged eve of execution, at its end they were to leave their old home for ever. Everything that lawyers could do, *had* been done to get at Mr. Cunnick, but he had escaped his pursuers, and was safe somewhere in America. There was no hope of restitution, and no repeal of that terribly comprehensive word—ruin.

Mercy was active all day,—too busy for feeling anything acutely, except this, that *every* corner

of the large house needed her careful supervision. As for Helen, she tried to work hard, but was often paralyzed with dismay. She used to gaze at any chance list of names, in newspaper or almanac, whether of bishops, heads of houses, or subscribers to a public charity, with an envying kind of curiosity, thinking how much happier they all were than she,—they had probably homes secure from such sudden overthrow as hers,—they had position, means, and, dearest of all desires to her just then, they had independence. She looked round her, and saw the commonest articles, the coal-scuttle, the folding-screen, and companionable-looking arm-chair, all wearing that unaltered aspect of tangible things which seems so sadly strange when all around is about to alter utterly; and she almost wondered that those senseless witnesses of the past, should still appear ready for the peaceful routine of home, now for ever broken up. They all seemed to stare at her tears.

A few days before the last at Fernwick, she was looking so ill, that her sister persuaded her to take a drive on some pretext of use and civility. P. P. C. cards had to be left at various houses, and one or two orders were to be given to people in the village, *vivâ voce*: as the day was so beautiful, and Helen so pale, she had better go and see that Burton made the people understand; and explain herself to the old woman who was going to take care of poor Fluff, what he was to be fed with, and how his collar ought to be cleaned when tarnished. With much coaxing and entreaty she prevailed; her sister had not been beyond the park, except to church, since their father's death, and it was a great effort to do so now.

As she drove along, she looked around with a feeling of impatience at the humdrum regularity of other lives. The children coming out from school, just as merry dirty and clamorous as usual; the baker giving down his loaves at the

back-doors with his customary brisk movements; the butcher-boy's whistle; the cat on the sill of the grocer's window; and oh! the doctor, and the doctor's gig, which had driven as fast to Fernwick that terrible morning, going by her now — all things, and all people looking as if life was a smooth and steady process, and the hopes, and cares, and joys of yesterday, might be surely depended upon for to-morrow. The peacefulness and leisure of other homes, uncon- vulsed by recent loss, where she saw "all things in order stored,"* seemed now inaccessibly remote from her own fate.

What! Was she, a member of one of the oldest families in the country, to be turned from her home, a lonely hopeless creature, and all about that home remain unchanged? Should happy families house in the pretty homes her dear father had built for them, and she wander from hers, and leave all as usual? His former tenants

* TENNYSON'S *Palace of Art*.

were sorry enough for her, no doubt—and wept many of them, as if the misfortune was their own,—but was all this sorrow and sympathy to be ineffectual for her aid? A difficult thing for one so young, so unused to hardships to accept; and she could not yet see that the only permanence of being possible to man is his spiritual condition, and that the love and wisdom of the Most High are the only consolations which do not suffer change. She wondered that one person's fate should so little affect the general community. She might as well have been surprised at seeing the daisies lift their crisp stars from the green sod close by the gap where a fallen tree had torn up the surrounding soil, and in its upheaval borne down a hundred adjacent blossoms.

On reaching home again, she found that Charles Ashcroft had been awaiting her return. He had begged to be allowed to wait in the garden—he wished, if possible, to gain an interview, and

feared that if he missed to-day's chance, there might not be another opportunity.

Wearied and puzzled with her grief, Helen gave him the audience he wished for, and so silent and spiritless was her manner, that, for a few minutes, he thought she would give him hopes; but while her eyes were bent on the ground, one hand was grasping the locket which held the fragments of Arthur's cross, and the other was slightly clenched. She let him come to a pause without interruption, and then slowly replied,—

“You are generous and kind to say this again, *now*; but though everything else is altered, what I feel about another cannot change. It would be happier for me perhaps if it could. But I tell you, Mr. Ashcroft, the truth, in order that you may never waste another thought upon me. I feel deeply your kindness, but I cannot forget.”

Both were silent—for in that inability, lay the sweet sorrow of either heart—and Charles knew

from experience what an impossibility stood in his way. To her, it would have been the greatest possible relief to have confided to his eager ear some of the heart-breaking feelings that oppressed her; but this was forbidden by a sense of honour, and for pity's sake too, she would not describe her full loneliness to him, and so pain him doubly, both on her own account as well as his. He guessed her wretchedness, and even dared to tell how he shrunk from contemplating what lay before her. She thanked him, trying to smile. But after a few more words had been exchanged, and a tender farewell taken, she rose, and he was obliged to go away. While confessing her secret, in order to spare his pride, she had only made him love her better; and the fascination she exercised over him, so unwillingly, was increased by the unfeigned simplicity of her manner.

As he left the room, he looked back to see her once more, but she had already turned away

and stepped out into the balcony. Leaning over its balustrade she gazed wistfully upon the lovely views which she was so soon to lose.

The slanting afternoon sunbeams were whitening the sheep in the park, and under its thorn-bushes lambs were resting milk-white heads on each other's woolly backs; while blackbirds piped as if the fulness of their joy could not be uttered often enough. March winds were blowing open every bud in the garden, and filling the highest tree-tops with sap, but every tree that thickened in its foliage gave her fresh warning that the time of banishment drew near. Those oak trees below, which had hitherto been merged in the general beauty of her father's ground, now took,—as she was about to leave them for ever,—a distinct individuality, and seemed to stand by and watch the trouble of the house with the mysterious indifference of a living world, present, but beyond communication.

Helen's eye took in every detail of the loveli-

ness of that sweet spring time, but her heart went again and again over the conversation just concluded. Had she done right in making that good kind fellow unhappy, at least for awhile? Could she have done otherwise? No, it was impossible. But though she could not accept his love, his tender and passionate pity had its influence, and seeing her present fate through the medium of his perceptions, she pitied herself with a keener anguish than she had felt before. And when Mercy came to look for her, she turned round and said, with some bitterness,—

“Oh, Mercy, why did you counsel me to distrust poor Arthur? If he were but here now!”

“Dearest Helen! can it be that at *such* a time as this, you would wish to lean on the support of an unsanctified mind?”

Not a word more was said: they had parted now in spirit further than any local distance could remove one from the other; and this was a secret separation which had no farewell to soothe it.

Helen went back to the lonely desert of her own inner life, silent with indignation and wounded love; while Mercy, seeing her move away without reply, thanked God in her heart for enabling her weak efforts to produce conviction of sin where it was so much needed.

How often does an unseen pang of difference produce essential alienation long before any sign of it reaches the surface! From that moment, Helen and Mercy could not converse quite as they had before; Helen was the first to feel the slight change, but her sister at last perceived it. She found constraint where there was wont to be the fresh effusion of thought; and one main channel of feeling was henceforth closed to her approach. The smart occasioned by her well-meaning words had spread too deep for after kindness wholly to assuage.

By a merciful law of nature, pain sometimes acts as a stimulus, and certain griefs as a tonic to the whole nervous system. The sting given

to Helen by her sister's indiscreet zeal, roused all her powers; while it enabled her to think of their long separation with less shrinking. She got through the last days and their many adieux, and the leaving Fernwick with a mixture of fortitude and insensibility which no one can imagine till a similar crisis has been experienced.

She went from Fernwick with her sister, to stay with some old friends who lived in Hertfordshire; and from thence the Slades went to their place of embarkment for China. A week later, Helen had lost her sister as well as her old home, and Norman and Mercy were on their way out.

CHAPTER VI.

Es spannt die Nacht ihr blaues zelt,
 Hoch über Gottes weite Welt,
 Die Welt so voll, und ich allein ;
 Die Welt so gross, und ich so klein.

Die Sonne dünkt mich matt und kalt,
 Die Blüthe welk, das Leben alt,
 Und was sie reden tauber schall ;
 Ich bin ein Fremdling überall.—SCHMIDT.

THE family with whom Helen spent the next month was one known to her more from hearsay than from personal intimacy. A widow lady and two unmarried sisters, long past their youth, who had been the friends of Mrs. Raymond in her childhood, and now proved their affection by a tender solicitude for her daughters. They gave them the kindest welcome, and the warmest

sympathy, but the weeks Helen passed at their house seemed interminable. When Mercy and all her vigilant kindness was really gone, and Norman's sturdy cheerful voice no longer sounded in her ears, she began to wonder how she could have consented to be left behind. Death, with them, would have been easier to welcome than her present isolation; and this foolish thought in the inmost corner of her heart that had reconciled her to it—this wild hope that before two years were past Arthur, knowing what had happened, would return and marry her, how could she harbour it! If it was against her poor father's wish before, would it not be shockingly, wickedly undutiful after his death? At any rate, she would not write to him, aunt Catherine must do that, and to attempt it herself, without betraying her misery, would be vain. No, he must write first. "*O la courageuse faculté que l'espérance!*"* She expected Arthur, even now, to make the first move for

* Montaigne.

reconciliation; she looked for his overtures of peace to come by the first mail that could bring them. Women easily attribute too much to love, and too little to pride. Perhaps this secret hope gave her more support than she chose to recognize; and truly she needed some plaything for her mind to divert its morbid recurrence to the dismal scenes of the last two months. These possessed her imagination; and on entering a house full of serene comforts, her first odd wild feeling was, "What is the good of having everything so pretty and comfortable? It is no use having everything put in such firm bright order. Death is sure to have all changed by-and-by. All these rooms must be made desolate and empty some day; why try to forget what must be coming?" For now death filled her inner eye, and a return to all the smooth habits of ordinary life felt like voluntary submission to a detected cheat. Those awful hours which had suddenly swallowed up her earthly goods, still seemed pre-

sent to her mind, while to all appearance so wonderfully passed, so completely effaced from the course of living concerns.

At the happiest season there is not a more lonely-feeling time than the first days of a visit before one has taken up the interests of a new place and is still painfully ignorant of all that is going on in the circle just left; and now while Mrs. Fraser and her two sisters, all capped and in spectacles, continued their placid routine of employment, Helen sat by, trying to *seem* to listen to their mild small talk, but inwardly aghast at the overwhelming despairs she had to combat.

A fine morning brought each beautiful spot in the garden "at home" before her with the sharpest sting of memory; a book on the table smote her with some sweet reminiscence of her father's kindness; a name, a scent, anything and everything drove her back to the paradise of early days; and sometimes,—speak, Truth, and let not shame suppress you!—sometimes she thought of Charles

Ashcroft, and remembered that even his love was pleasant.

She was too unselfish and considerate to let her grief appear more than she could possibly avoid; so the knitting pins of her kind companions clicked on with unsuspecting composure, and they only remarked among themselves that, "no doubt the Lord was now dealing very closely with that sweet girl," and that it was "well indeed that a young creature so beset with the snares of beauty and wit, should bear the yoke in her youth."

They were devout, but not very wise, or very skilful in their treatment of common human nature, so that whenever grief overflowed, and Helen confessed but a part of her temptation to feel as if God had showed Himself cruel towards her, instead of meeting the avowal, as "the words of the desperate" should always be met, with temporary acceptance, they at once opened upon her a battery of religious counsels. So far from remembering their Master's mild forbearance when

saying, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now," their principle seemed to be, they that are in a condition to be preached at, let them be preached at—irrespective of any other consideration than that what they urged was truth.

But the kindness of their motive was unmistakeable, and Helen felt it and was grateful. When the term of her visit had expired, and they had taught her all they could of many little feminine arts of which she was before heinously ignorant, such as quilling net, making sleeves, cutting out collars, etc., and tried thus to make her feel independent of the help of a lady's-maid, now no longer possible for her; she was almost sorry to leave them for her less quiescent relations.

It was the second week in May, and at their earnest request she had agreed to go to the Great Exhibition on her way to the Trouncers'. The old ladies thought that such a novel scene must please a young person, but it is a mistake to

expect any joy to be found outside a very sad heart. Her aunt had arranged to meet her, at a given point in the Exhibition, leaving her time for as much sight-seeing as she thought she could then endure.

Mrs. Fraser and her sisters accompanied her to the brilliant palace, and very kindly took her to the most attractive parts, and Helen exerted herself bravely in appearing to enjoy it; but after an hour or two she felt so faint-hearted and weary that she begged to be left alone at the appointed rendezvous: she said that it would rest her more to be quite by herself, that she should be well amused by merely looking about her where she sat, and they, meanwhile, could be unfettered by her disabilities, and find her there half an hour later.

It was a relief when they turned away, for in the solitude of a vast crowd she could better come to an understanding with her own heart, than was possible when exclamations of surprise and delight

were every minute expected from her. She sat near the Austrian department, staring joylessly first at one object, then at another, bewildered and plagued by a profound anguish of inward rebellion. Tinkling bursts of pianoforte notes sounded here and there; now and then the music of a grand organ “yearning like a god in pain;”^{*} and from time to time a sweet-toned bell. The eye was dazzled with a multiplicity of gorgeous objects; bright sunshine streamed through many-coloured fabrics above, below, around; and amongst all the beauties of man’s devising, it found out the imprisoned birdless tree, and slept softly on its branches.

How beautiful and grand was the sight before her! what a people for success the English are! how much wealth and happiness, and its usual adjunct—recklessness—there must be under that one roof! How many hearts beat gay and light close by!—what happy laughter!—what

^{*} Keats.

sweet smiles, she heard and saw among the numbers passing by! Then, dismissing comparisons of envy and regret, she strove to lift herself above personal feelings, and to regard the splendid spectacle as an Englishwoman only, and rejoice and feel proud of national prosperity. Vain effort, however laudable! For we cannot at will detach the mind from sensation, the feelings from self. Through all her nobler sentiments she felt the black melancholy of her own isolated being. She called herself, for the sake of pathos, a destitute orphan, a now-forgotten once-adored woman; a neglected visitor, a burdensome dependant, and so contrived to sting her heart with pride as well as grief. Grief is seldom strictly veracious in its statements, and it being much more than an hour since Mrs. Fraser went, and past the time when Mrs. Trouncer was to have met her, she had a flimsy excuse for such exaggeration.

As she looked round to see if she could descry

her aunt, Mr. Heathcote's figure came in sight; a young lady had his arm, his smiles, his fond protecting care. It was his bride, and he did not see Helen, but passed down an aisle in another direction. She had received his wedding cards and a kind letter from him a fortnight or three weeks before, and she had certainly no right to feel pained at this most unintentional slight. But she was very, very tired and confused with the endless variety of strange faces moving around her; she longed to rest her eye upon a friend's, to hear a friend speak, and feel less piteously alone.

Again she turned her head. Within two yards of where she sat, Charles Ashcroft was walking with a party of ladies, neither of whose faces she knew; lively talk was passing between them. At a first impulse she half rose to go towards him, but a stronger feeling kept her back, and withdrew her eyes from the group till she had been passed without recognition;

and then it followed her old friend with a curious mixture of satisfaction and chagrin.

“On no account would I have him see me looking so forlorn,” she said to herself. “I must not have his pity any more.”

But using that word about herself quite unnerved her, and she fairly burst into tears, though close to her crape-covered dress lay the far-stretching folds of a very fashionable young lady, who, with several others, was resting and chattering on the bench. She heeded not who was there, nor when they went, but covered her eyes, and quieted herself as best she could.

Some one spoke—addressed her it seemed—and she looked up surprised. An elderly gentleman was leaning towards her from the end of the seat, and, with great courtesy, begged to be allowed to fetch her a glass of water or any other restorative which she could like to try.

“Pardon the intrusiveness of a stranger, my

dear madam," he said, "but you appeared so evidently overcome by the heat that I venture to claim the privilege of happier intimates."

Helen thanked him, and willingly accepted the offer of a glass of water: it gave her time to recover herself. But when she had taken it she could not command her face any better, and was obliged to mutter something by way of explanation.

"It is my first attempt at gaiety since a great and desolating loss," she said, laying her hand upon her black dress. "I am not fit for public appearance yet," she added, hoping to assume calmness with light tones.

The stranger was unmistakeably a gentleman, or she could not have said so much. The expression of his bald head and tense features was kindness, crossed by a vein of pomposity and self-appreciation almost comic. A lady sat beside him, sickly-looking, flushed, and apparently very tired of keeping her face in an attitude of pleasure.

She coughed often, and hardly looked at him when he turned to her and said,—

“My dear wife knows that I am too good and experienced a nurse to press upon any sufferer an undesired remedy, yet, if I might be so bold as to suggest advice, I would certainly ask leave to fetch you a little wine and biscuit, now that faintness is, as I hope, entirely removed.”

“Oh, thank you,” replied Helen, smiling involuntarily now, “thank you; but I don’t think they would do any good to faintness of heart; and that is all that is the matter with me.”

“*That*, my dear lady, there is but one who can relieve ——”

Before he could finish his sentence, Mrs. Trouncer and Matilda stood beside her, vociferous and warm. At their approach, the stranger, raising his hat, offered his arm to the invalid, and was soon out of sight.

“Who was that you were talking to, my love?”

inquired Mrs. Trouncer, when the first greetings were over.

“Really I cannot tell you; some kind person unknown, who got me a glass of water, seeing me quite undone with the glare and heat of the place—and my own dismal thoughts.”

“Not at all a correct thing, my dear. What, was Mrs. Fraser about to leave you here by yourself? Is that her you are nodding to? Pray make haste now, and take leave. I have already got your luggage from the —— Station, and it is time we were off.”

Helen put down her thick veil as she passed through the gaily-dressed crowd, reluctant to meet and be recognized by either of the friends she had chanced to see; but yet she left the place with an odd sensation, that in leaving it she left the last connecting link between her bright past, and this doleful, ugly present.

CHAPTER VII.

"Some months I suffered thus, compelled to sit
And hear a wealthy kinsman aim at wit."—CRABBE.

"Vaines pointures ; vaines parfois, mais toujours pointures.
Les plus menus et grâiles empeschements sont les plus per-
ceantes ; et comme les petites lettres lassent plus les yeulx aussi
nous picquent plus les petits affaires. La tourbe des menus
maulx offense plus que la violence d'un, pour grand qu'il soit."—
MONTAIGNE.

THE first evening at the Trouncers', Helen was in truth too wretchedly out of spirits to know much about. She begged to be excused coming downstairs—headache and fatigue quite disabling her—and spent the twilight hours on a couch by the window. Curiosity about a new home did not overcome the cold languor with which she was oppressed, and all she gathered about

her present locality was, that the rooms seemed very small, and the doors all over the house shut with a short teasing little slap, very different in sound from the heavy sonorous slam of outer doors at Fernwick, or the muffled swing of green baize ones within. She heard some loud vulgar tones from children below her window, and hoped they were not the voices of Arabella, Penelope, and Marmaduke, not seen by her for some years. She saw a coarse, thick-set servant-maid, much overdone with cherry-coloured ribbons in her cap, curtseying and muttering at the door. She said, "Nothing, thank you," as loud as she could, and hoped it was not the maid she must depend upon for inevitable help. In both matters, her hopes were frustrate. Marmaduke and Pennan were bawling in the garden at play, and Betsy, the upper housemaid, did henceforth come in to "do Miss Raymond, and hook her frock."

Poor Helen! Nothing could be kinder than

her cousins in practical attention to her wants; they had always, as she now remembered with some comfort, seemed fond of her, and would, therefore, she felt, be indulgent now. Their fondness was questionable: it might have been unkind to say that they had *toadied* Helen: it was nothing worse than solicitous deference to her opinion; the natural attitude of people feeling themselves at a social disadvantage beside her. But from the very first day of her being admitted as one of the family, a new element seemed to have crept into their mutual relations; as it appeared to Helen, they were always trying to set her right about something or other. Of course, in her greatly altered position, she had much to learn,—in matters of economy and self-help, almost everything, but she could not understand what had become of all that in herself which Matilda and Esther used to admire and make much of.

Esther's weakness of mind found solace in the

exercise of dictating to other people and telling them repeatedly what they ought to do or not to do, as if bringing them, thereby, to a conclusion to which they could not arrive without her interference: — an annoying trick, which Matilda seldom allowed her to indulge in long towards herself, cutting her short with a sharp-toned, “What’s that to you I should like to know?” or, “That’s no business of yours;” but Helen’s natural gentleness subjected her to an unresisting attention; and beyond the simple method of conveying herself away from a troublesome presence, *she* had no means of stemming the stream of undesired counsel. She thus got a good deal of it during the first week, when grateful politeness kept her generally in the drawing-room. But Matilda improved the opportunity also, and was apt ever and anon to declare impressively that such and such a thing wouldn’t do *here*; making the new-comer feel as if she moved in a labyrinth of imperceptible snares.

"Your new house is very unlike the one in Bank-street," Helen remarked, as they sat together the afternoon of her first day of residence.

"It has many more rooms, I suppose, otherwise it would not seem to me more convenient in point of size. Of course, the garden and quiet country air are worth every other advantage."

"The rooms are smaller," replied Matilda, "but we really could not have gone on in the old house, as the little ones got old enough to need two rooms: yours is almost the largest in the house. You know you've our best room."

"It is very kind of aunt to let me have it; and I find it very comfortable. It is so nice having the strip of garden between the window and the road. One could almost forget there was a road, except when the railway omnibuses go by. The yew-trees make an excellent screen."

"But, Helen," interposed Esther, "I hope you won't leave the windows open, except a bit at the top. You cannot think how much dust

comes in; it will soon spoil the new chintz, if you do: people are so apt to forget that."

Marmaduke pushed his head in at the window just then.

"Ma! where's ma? I want some bobbin for my bandalore!"

"Mamma is not here," said Helen, who sat nearest the window; "but if you will come in, I think I can find what you want."

He was at her side in a minute, trampling upon her crape tucks with dusty feet; impatient to snatch what he wanted from her work-basket.

"Gently, my dear, you are tearing my dress."

"That'ul do." And he was out of the room with a bang.

"Helen, do you mean to wear that dress every day? It seems to me very extravagant to do so."

"Is it? then, perhaps I ought to get another."

"What nonsense, Esther; you don't suppose she *could* wear less crape yet; why will you be always interfering?"

"Lady Jane Hatfield was in Mercer's shop in plain paramatta six weeks after *her* father's death, for I saw her."

"I daresay; but the honourable Mrs. Lacey thinks it quite out of the question to appear *anywhere* without crape on the skirt, for her dressmaker told me so; and, I suppose, she may be taken for a pretty good authority."

"For *you*, very likely; you think her such a model."

"And so she is. It's quite ridiculous of you, Esther, to pretend to instruct me about such things. It reminds me of what Lady Hardwicke often says, when I talk to her about country ways, 'My dear, the obstinacy with which secluded people cling to their little canons of taste is quite laughable. If they have once heard any one *they* think an authority pronounce upon a point, nothing will ever shake their adherence to it.'"

And so the paltry squabble went on; each of

the sisters playing off acquaintances upon the other, for Helen's especial information. She was glad to remember that she ought to write a note before post time, in answer to kind inquiries from Mrs. Naseby.

The complete *épouvante* which the manners of her cousins now caused her, was indescribable. The hours passed slowly, each giving her a fresh start of pain or distaste: such rudeness, such inelegance of thought, and word, and deed, she had not supposed possible among people of her own class. When she had visited her aunt before, they must have put a great restraint upon themselves; or the six years which had intervened must have developed their uncouthness wonderfully.

Esther would jerk herself out of the room even while some one was speaking to her, and then come back with a slam of the door, which left the speaker nothing more to say. The sisters contradicted one another flatly; disputed angrily

about a mere trifle, before servants; snatched up what they wanted, and hastily pushed aside what they did not want, with all the *abandon* of school-boys. And this, from grown women, was revolting to her inexperienced eyes. She used to ponder how it was that people of good extraction could thus behave—how it was that gentle blood did not blush for such ungentele demeanour. It was very intelligible, though not yet to her; a masterful pretentious wife over-riding an indolent, coarse-grained man. Neither of them used to self-restraint in trifles, they naturally acquired the stamp of vulgar minds—want of self-control, and undisciplined energy—and their children, as is the wont of descendants, carried out their parents' peculiarities to an excessive degree.

All Mrs. Trouncer's thoughts and feelings were circumscribed by three strong influences—religion of a certain sort, sincere, but only partially effective; family attachment (not affection), and family pride. Beyond these barriers her mind

rarely, and with difficulty, travelled: it was self-centred, and regarded the common interests of humanity with far less concern than she felt for an old family teapot which bore the Raymond crest, and had for generations been dedicated to the use of thorough-bred families, "with whom alone," as she was wont to assure her step-daughters, "we thought well to keep up social intercourse."

Her husband, good easy-going man, did not suffer from his wife's inequalities of temper so much as a looker-on might have supposed; neither does the player of a wrong note in music feel it to be quite so painful as it sounds to the ear of another person who sees nothing of the difficulties of the passage; in both cases, a previous conviction that kind dealing, and the right note is *intended*, neutralizes the pain of discord.

He considered her altogether a very fine woman, and, knowing her warm heart more intimately than any one else, his high estimate of its good feeling was more to be trusted than that of indifferent

people, who could see the worst of her temper, but not the best of her disposition. His worst foible was an unchecked propensity to joke; and his jokes were deplorably weak and silly; and with all the vanity that he had, he emphasized them. Believing that Helen was a lively person by nature, and wishing to cheer her, he was now more than usually laborious in his wit. For instance, one of her first mornings at breakfast, he said to his wife,

“Do you know, my dear, what carrier your box went by?”

“I told you that stupid Phillips quite forgot to send it; there it stands in the hall now.”

“But I can assure you it *did* go: it went by default.”

At such jokes as these, all present were expected to laugh. At any cost of folly he liked to raise a loud laugh round his table, and often succeeded, unless his wife was in a bad temper, and then he was snubbed of course.

When Helen had been staying with her uncle before, she had with bodily ears heard the coarseness of his tone, and seen with bodily eyes the silliness of his laugh, but *then* they had not been, so to speak, *en rapport* with her individual life; they did not tell upon her fate, so she passed them over as disagreeables only worth a smile; *now*, as with all people dependent on another, she winced under his infirmities as under instruments of torture applied to her own nature and particular lot.

As a passing guest, she had taken all the little politics of her aunt's circle with the easy indifference of a visitor, only indirectly concerned in the social sphere that surrounded her. Now, it was so different! It devolved upon her to help to entertain a certain old Mr. Page (a retired army surgeon, high in Trouncer esteem,) twice a week, with all the *on-dits* of the village; and it was all important for her aunt's and cousins' peace that she should please Mrs. Lacey,

and approve herself to the taste of Lady Jane Hatfield,—no difficulty, if only she could have given her mind to it with becoming solicitude. But really it never came into her head to try to please one person more than another.

She had ceased from those proud sayings which used so often to be sounding in her mind as a girl, about what she could *not* endure, *would* not tolerate, and the like; any kind of arrogance that she ever had, was tamed by the bitter humiliations of the last two months; and though now a sadder woman, she was by many degrees a wiser woman too. Yet all she had learned of wisdom, left her completely blind to the motive of much that was said and done in her aunt's household.

If either she herself, or Mercy, had been able to imagine or anticipate half the annoyances to which she was here subjected, they would never have dismissed their old governess's kind overture in the way they did; they would have felt

as strongly as she did, that an ambiguous position in any family may be far more distressing than one of recognized service and established rights ; and, assuredly, they would not have accepted what the Trouncers so benevolently offered.

In one respect, Helen's present condition was more independent than at first it seemed likely to be. She was enabled to make some contribution towards the expenses of her maintenance. Diligent inquiry had led Mr. Heathcote to discover a legal document which placed the proceeds of a farm in Yorkshire entirely at his disposal for Mr. Raymond's daughters : — proving that this was property of their mother's, and unalienable for the discharge of their father's enormous debt.

With Mercy's full consent,—for the good news reached them a few days before the Slades left England, this unhopd-for contingent was to be wholly given to Helen ; besides thirty pounds

paid to her uncle, it allowed about forty pounds more for her own private use. Seventy pounds a year altogether for her entire income. Enough, as she truly felt, to be very thankful for, but a scanty supply compared to what she had hitherto been used to.

When telling Mr. Heathcote how grateful she was for this saving from the Fernwick wreck, she assured him, also, that she was going to be frightfully economical; that she had actually trimmed a garden bonnet, with her cousin's help, and had bought a pair of thread gloves.

CHAPTER VIII.

"It is dark, and the child has no whither to run but to his father."—CECIL.

"Dans le calme, dans le bonheur, la vie est un travail facile ; mais on ne sait pas combien dans l'infortune, de certaines pensées, de certains sentiments qui ont ébranlé votre cœur, font époque dans l'histoire de vos impressions solitaires."—DE STAËL *sur la Littérature.*

SOMETIMES the inmost feelings of other people come to our perception before we have had time to learn what external profession is intended to represent. With children and simple-hearted people, this is more especially the case. Helen had the inexperience of the one, and the untroubled observation of the other ; and both qualities make the heart keenly alive to unexpressed emotions. In Matilda's, behind a great deal of affectionate-

ness in manner, she felt dislike towards herself. This puzzled her; but being aware, also, that in her good-humoured days Mrs. Trouncer was apt to lavish marked attentions upon *her*, while, from mere habit, she went on snubbing her step-daughters; she fancied that she was probably a little in their way, and that if she remained more by herself, things would go on more pleasantly below stairs.

It was no penalty to her to be by herself, for her thoughts were chiefly occupied by the absent; for Mercy missed, and longed for more and more; and Arthur, loved more passionately every day that she felt the loss of what she so gladly sacrificed to that love; and her dear father, dwelling in silence, but, possibly, an unseen witness of her loneliness, were her spirit's companions now; and it soothed her to sit still and remember, and hope, and pray. She now needed no persuasive sermons to make her believe that God was a very present God. But yet, after

raising herself to highest communion for a little time, when no diversion from without came to recreate energy, she felt her heart sink to a lassitude that was almost insensibility. Often, sitting alone at her bedroom window, she seemed to herself half dead, and quite forgotten by the rest of the world; so debilitated by grief, that she would count up who still loved her, with a kind of nervous curiosity. Many, besides Mercy and Arthur, loved her sincerely; but at this time there was "no man to comfort her, neither cared any one" for her soul's conflict. God would have the whole of that cure to Himself.

One afternoon, as she sat thus, when all the others had gone out, driving or walking, she came to a wholesome resolution. It was merely this: that in bringing her into such a furnace of affliction, her Maker must have designed that she should be a strong instrument in His hand for some great work;—so much melting and re-moulding of nature could not be appointed without a high aim;

something good, even here, must come of such a fierce passion of sorrow as she now had to grapple with daily.

The thought quickened her pulse, and gave new light to her eyes. What was to be her ultimate destiny, her appointed conquest in the Lord's battle-field? Arthur's faith? And through his powerful agency, the welfare of other souls, equally in danger from the presumption of mere intellect, and the snares of a noble pride? If this was the answer given by her heart, good sense spoke more to the purpose; and told her that diligent improvement of present talents was a duty from which no amount of selfish sorrow could discharge her. This habitual musing and dreaming was wrong, and she would no longer give way to it. And at once she acted on the determination, and went down-stairs.

The house was so quieted by the absence of most of its inmates, that the children's fowls had had time to break through their barriers, and were

stalking with leisurely tread over the new-mown lawn; picking worms from its sun-bright surface without the hurried, furtive air which marks their search for morning forage. Helen watched them with the curious interest that is felt by one too languid for any that are personal. She fixed her eyes on the field beyond, now nearly ready for mowing, crowded with minute insect life and every shape of grassy beauty, and thought that to some people the quiet scene might look pleasing, endearing, and full of home charms; that even now the lane that ran down the side of the garden, shaded by tall hedgerows, looked peaceful and inviting. Ah! there were some dog-roses in blossom, and a long spray hanging within reach; but she had no heart to gather them. It might be a happy June day for others, but as for her, unless she made haste and got something to do, its beauty would crush her with despair. So she went back into the drawing-room, and took out her drawing things, rung for a glass of water,

placed her paper at the exactly best position for the light, and opened her box of colours. It had not been opened since Mercy was wrapping up every little brick of paint in silver paper, while she gave her sister a long and tender exhortation about submission to the will of God. Helen threw herself back in the chair; it was of no use, she could not draw to-day.

But there are few gardens absolutely without heartsease, and few days when one may not make oneself happier by adding to the happiness of another. Mr. Trouncer returned from his office before his wife and children were in, and in a careless, good-humoured chat with him, walking up and down the lawn, after she had helped him to drive out the transgressing poultry, Helen lightened her heart. The simple enjoyment of pleasing an anxious mind refreshed her own. In his home Helen was not so much alone in unhappiness that sad day as she supposed herself. There was a pathetic grief sighing within him even

at his office now and then, which no one guessed. With all his common-place feeling and usual phlegm, he was not free from a degree of susceptibility which—being Mrs. Trouncer's husband—he would have been happier without. He could not but feel sometimes in spite, nay, rather, because of her occasional endearments, that *his* life was more valuable to her and his children, as a means of subsistence, than as a charm to the easy life he had secured to them by his ceaseless industry.

In fact, he had from time to time a keen perception that his life was valued as a commodity, and not cherished by any tenderness of love. Mrs. Trouncer's large hand being now and then laid upon his dull tow-coloured hair, while he rested on the arm-chair after dinner, with a loud—"Well, my dear! you seem a little run down to-night!"—did not serve to remove the impression; and if he drove it away from his thoughts, and roused himself to make a clumsy joke, or to ask

one of his girls to play something lively (a polka he always preferred), human witnesses would have given him little credit; but surely his guardian angel did.

He was very fond of his younger children, but Arabella treated him with maternal scorn already, if it did not suit her to do what he wished; Pennan was peevish, and whined to her mother if he did but pat her heartily on the back, and Marmaduke made faces at him if he ventured on any prohibition. They had all learned to consider themselves "a cut above Pa." Naturally; for if he pleased them by any little treat over and above what their mother allowed, she was pretty sure to make him feel her displeasure.

So to-day, when walking beside Helen, as soon as he could recover breath after a panting chase round the garden in pursuit of an amazed and misunderstanding hen, he said, with half a sigh,—

"If I could get that young chap to mind what I said, it would be an uncommon fine thing, but

you see, my dear, his mother don't make no point at all of that. Bless me! here she comes up through the close gate, and somebody with her."

"Mrs. Lacey, I think."

Helen had the misfortune not to admire this lady; to her she seemed a woman of little real refinement, who made even her civilities offensive by showing through them all that, unless she *chose* to regard one favourably, she would not scruple to be rude—even to insolence. Besides this, she had adopted towards Helen a patronizing manner which was excessively distasteful to her pride. The Trouncers were unanimous in expecting their guest to be gratified; and as she was in a position of partial dependence, they looked for her to bow to their family verdict by every possible concession of opinion; but some natures cannot stoop, and by her unbending uprightness Helen's gained many a knock.

Perhaps it was in her case blameable: the pre-

judices of many a good old person demand, and possibly ought to obtain, the same compliant attitude of mind that the Trouncers expected; but with old people the effort of complying is less, because forbearance and generosity prompts it. The question is, whether the poverty of nature in those who make the same unreasonable demand should not induce us from sheer pity to yield as much and as gracefully? The idea never occurred to Helen, but she advanced to greet Mrs. Lacey with her naturally easy grace; and her aunt, mistaking good manners for the effect of attraction, was pleased to notice how well her niece could receive such a particular person as Mrs. Lacey. Mr. Trouncer was apologizing for being so hot, "blown" with driving out the fowls, as he roundly declared himself: an expression which would have cost him something worse than a scowl from his wife if she had been unshackled by a superior presence.

It shocked Helen to observe the change in her

aunt's manner when guests were present; the over-smoothed tone, the over-anxious politeness, the constraint of one with whom deference and consideration was a rare and not disinterested effort. She knew that contempt is itself as contemptible as it is unchristian, and yet she could hardly avoid feeling it.

Mrs. Lacey called to propose a little water-party in her grounds next week; would Miss Raymond feel inclined to be of the number who came? Helen, much to her aunt's surprise, accepted the invitation with an air of unfeigned pleasure. In truth the thought of a pleasant day out of doors came before her then as a welcome diversion. She was too constantly broken down with grief now to think of showing a consistent mournfulness; and really felt all the longing of youth for enjoyment of any sort that she could still get.

A great sorrow changes so much; emptying some words of their meaning, and giving double

significance to others; making "amusement" sound like an outlived toy, and serious thoughts seem the only ones worth having. But after this has been felt some time, a return to every frivolity is most natural; and the rebound of the mind is in exact proportion to the violence of its wrench from usual habits.

"I shall really like to come extremely," Helen repeated with simple earnestness.

"If you have no objection to rather a large party. I entertain my young people from our middle-class school the same day; but that need not incommode you, of course."

At dinner-time when Mrs. Trouncer spoke of Mrs. Lacey's invitation, and Helen's willingness to go, looks of intelligence were exchanged between Matilda and Esther; and Helen knew their meaning: an unpleasant one, of course, or they would have said what they meant instead of looking it with ostentatious secrecy.

"Well, I am surprised that you agreed to go,

my dear," said Mrs. Trouncer as they reached the drawing-room, "all things considered. I should not like one of *my* girls to go to a fête three months after Trouncer was buried: but I don't wish to interfere, you know; only if you ask *my* opinion, I should say a little more reluctance to show yourself just now would be as well."

"Oh! I do not care, aunt. I wish you had stopped my saying 'yes,' when Mrs. Lacey was here."

"Oh! (with a little snort, and a toss of the chin), oh, that's the last thing I should think of with *you*, Helen: no, you must go now, of course."

Mrs. Trouncer had motherly reasons for not being in any hurry to show her beautiful niece beside her very plain step-daughters at a large party; and a little personal vexation got into her voice when answering thus. Yet practically she acted kindness, and theoretically she felt it. But there is a wide difference between the kindness

which is spontaneous and loving, and that which conscience exacts: kindness proceeding from principle and will is often stern, though probably a more consistent product than that which emanates from warm impulse. Helen felt the difference with a shudder. Mercy's kindness had been always so instinctive. It is the cruel effect of kindness without love that it makes one seem unloveable in one's own eyes; for self-love follows a prevailing fashion of self-estimate more than pride ever cares to confess, and when people go all the length of external kindness and yet cannot love you, no wonder you feel convinced of being disagreeable.

Wayward as a sorrowful spirit usually is, it was beyond measure irritating to Helen to be dictated to about the proper modes of expression which grief ought to take. She sank into profound silence, and scarcely heard what was said during tea-time about Edwin's return from Oxford the following day. She had never seen him; but his

father's reiterated assertion that he was "quite a Trouncer,"—uttered with the complacency that implied that this ensured a consummate success—did not incline her to expect much pleasure from his society.

CHAPTER IX.

“Ergebung ist nur durch Erhebung möglich—
 Erhebung zu des geistes grossem Sein,
 Dem göttlichen, unsterblichen und guten.”

L. SCHEFER.

“Les coups les plus terribles partent souvent des grandes âmes. Les plus beaux caractères sont les plus cruels sans le savoir; chacune de leurs nobles actions est une condamnation sans appel; leur disproportion est une ironie, leur contraste est un outrage.”

M. DE EMILE DE GIRARDIN.

AMONG other good resolutions, Helen now made up her mind to offer to teach Arabella Italian. French she would fain have proposed, having chanced to be present at one of her mother's French lessons, and found her ears much annoyed by terrible mouthfuls of mispronunciation, but it was a hazardous thing to propose to supersede another teacher; and all she bargained for at first

was for a morning hour with the little girl for Italian and music, if her aunt liked to be spared that trouble.

Well aware of Helen's superior accomplishments, Mrs. Trouncer thankfully closed with the offer, and only hoped the child's temper would never prove too much for her kind cousin: this when speaking to Helen. When she was not in presence a different tone was taken. She and her elder daughters called it then "very nice, very proper," of Helen to desire to be helpful; phrases which, being translated, mean that the person spoken of has gratified the self-love of the speaker as well as satisfying his or her moral sense of what is abstractedly right. Arabella happened to be in the room when they were used on this occasion, and drew her own conclusions; so that when her nurse, full of admiration for the sweet-looking lady who knocked at the nursery door before she summoned the child, observed to her that she ought to be very proud of Miss Raymond's kind-

ness to her, and never keep her waiting, Arabella was ready with the unchild-like retort, "*Why?*" it's quite right she should do all she can for us. She's quite dependent, Ma says."

And Helen really did earnestly wish to repay the parents' kindness by helping the children. She hoped to have a good influence over them, and strove to win their love. But when nearly all the time they spent in the same room she was trying to swallow some indignation, or to digest some disgust (for they were sadly riotous and unmanageable), there was not much play of intellect at her disposal for promoting beneficial amusements.

Civility, as well as good feeling, restrained the Trouncers from saying in so many words, "All you *can* do that is serviceable you ought to do in this house;" but she did not require many weeks' intercourse for becoming perfectly aware of the coarse thoughts some of them entertained on the head of obligations, dependence, and acknowledged need. She was aware of them, but endeavouring

to act from motives too high for disturbance from personal chagrin, she valiantly persevered; and at last attained something like fondness for Penelope, who was a sickly little thing often needing indulgence, and entire self-command during Arabella's pouting moods.

Edwin Trouncer arrived, a thick-complexioned, straw-coloured young man, who thought all his relations "devilish slow," and spared no pains to exhilarate the home circle, either by an animal vivacity, which made his presence alarming to delicate nerves, or an unceasing scintillation of Pickwickian humour, which wounded taste and tired attention by its prolonged need of construe. He was certainly clever, but cleverness in conversation is no longer a gentlemanly distinction; his was the product of a shrewd mind, saturated with cheap and popular literature.

Helen disliked him at the first glance, and took good care to employ her eyes and hands so long as he was in the room, but the more she kept

silence, the more he "chaffed" his sisters, ever and anon looking to see how the stranger cousin was affected. Sometimes with most unwilling laughter, for the absurdities of under-graduate life, told with much mimetic action, overthrew her calm dignity: but she got more and more grave as the laughter of the others got louder and more excessive; and when he came to recitals of how many "deuced fine girls were pulling caps for him," she rose and left the room.

"She's a stunner!" exclaimed Edwin, "rather too high and mighty, though, for my taste—holds her head uncommonly high for one whose father swindled her out of everything. What's the figure left?"

"I don't understand you," Esther replied.

"Why, how much has she? The paymaster seems to like her; and I hope she does not pay here, poor girl."

"Oh, she is very gentle and insinuating, no doubt; butter would never melt in her mouth, I

daresay. Thirty pounds, I believe, father has for her keep; all she can give, poor thing! but it's little enough."

"She does not look like one obliged to economize, does she, Edwin? No duchess could dress more elegantly." This was Matilda's remark.

Mrs. Trouncer and her daughters often wondered in their private conclaves that Helen Raymond could so far forget her position as to dress in the way she did; they spoke of her whole *manière d'être* as unbecoming, because it still suited the Miss Raymond of Fernwick rather than an orphan visitor among relations less used to luxury. They spoke as if habit, taste, and demeanour were things to be thrown off at will; to lay aside bones and muscles would be quite as easy. Helen was denying herself in a number of trifles, while to them she seemed to be going on in old extravagances; for in feeling and habits of thought she was still the beautiful heiress of a rich man. She had no notion of being fine-ladyish; but she was impatient

of old dresses and questionable boots; her conduct with regard to these annoyed her cousins—long used to practise economy—and they could not imagine how strange and new all their little plottings to make a muslin skirt look fresher, or a bow “do,” were to her, who, until now, had had much less to do with her toilet than her maid had. They little guessed what self-conquest it cost their cousin, day by day, to mend her own linen, sadly and unskilfully toiling over it in her own room, nor how often her ignorance of the minutiae of good management involved her in needless expense. They were willing enough to help her whenever she came and asked for advice or direction how to set about things, but to pity her tenderly was not in them. Without a certain elevation of character there can be no tenderness; and besides they stood in awe of her more refined nature, and those we fear we cannot pity. They appear powers,—no one feels compassion for the strong,—and she was strong in her beauty and her grace.

Her cousins were uncomfortably conscious of this; they did not say to themselves Helen is one of those—

“Who do tower
Above us in their beauty, and must reign
In right thereof; for 'tis the eternal law
That first in beauty should be first in might;”

but they felt it; and naturally when made aware that—

“So on our heels a fresh perfection treads.”*

they liked to give it a little compensating kick. In their social attitude, and Helen's, there was just the difference of one who had been used to lounge gracefully in a very easy double-sprunged well-cushioned carriage, and another who had been cramped up in a little narrow pony-phæton, which only admits an erect sitter-up, and leaves face and hands exposed to sun and wind. Fate had now dislodged Helen from her former position, and there was in Trouncer-bosoms a feeling of gratified justice, an unexpressed thought, “Now

* KEATS, *Hyperion*.

she will know something of what we have been obliged to put up with all our lives." Neighbours soon find out this sort of thing. Helen's place among the Trouncers was, to a degree, unascertained, and whenever this is the case incomers are pretty sure to guess at disagreements, and speculate on the amount of ill-feeling probable on either side; their theories taking one side or the other, according to their prepossessions. Helen found herself invariably either condoled with in private, as a victim of Mrs. Trouncer's temper, or regarded askance by old family friends, or new intimates (women of course), who, in her absence from the room, had considerably inquired if dear Mrs. Trouncer did not find such a guest—for a *permanence*—a great charge and anxiety?

"It must put your good daughters in rather a trying position, I should imagine," one fierce-looking widow would sigh out, while a demure spinster (her own familiar toady) would add with naïve malice, "Oh, for the matter of that, goodness

cannot be eclipsed by all the pretty faces in the world." Was it strange if the atmosphere in which such notions circulated burdened Helen's susceptibility with secret disquiet, of which she could give no account to herself except that she felt dislike in it?

As long as every friend applauded her merciful design of receiving a homeless niece, and so kept up the warmth of her heart with cordials of admiration, Mrs. Trouncer felt no waverings of good-will towards her. A handsome melancholy orphan appeared to her unprincipled imagination no unpleasing accessory to the family group; but when the kindness she intended had been for some weeks a matter of course, her feelings slightly cooled, and she added an emphasis to every word that could give vent to a suppressed and closely veiled impatience. "But of course such a venture cannot be undertaken without a sacrifice," she would say to any confidential visitor who called, while Helen was engaged with Arabella. And so

many of *her* visitors were doomed to be confidential! She found the duties of entertainment burdensome, until unwary ones gave her an opening for introducing her own grievances. Poor woman! hers was the insanity of an uncontrolled egotism: all who knew her knew its excesses, and laughed at them behind her back with angry ridicule; pitied her to her face, with false airs of sympathy, or sincerely with true condolence—that she applied to her fate, and they who spoke to the nature. To say that she *intended* to speak truth is as much as could be said of her veracity. For habitual truthfulness, more is needed than this mere intention—a fineness of nature to perceive small differences, and a quickness of conscience to detect the bias given to all opinions by self-love. Thus when gossips pitied her for “the care and trouble such a striking-looking guest must cause,” though well aware that their pity was undeserved, she was so fond of being pitied and spoken of as a victim that she did not take the trouble to justify

Helen, and rectify her neighbours' estimate of her. Unsensitive to tacit falsehood, she would only smile meaningly and shake her head, as if feeling more than she cared to express. She balanced one thing with another, and so satisfied conscience. Though the conduct of her niece caused her no trouble, a comparison of her looks and manners with those of the daughters she had so long hoped to see married caused a great deal.

If those who blame outward seemings saw the reasons of them, few—very few—would be harshly blamed, and all would be deeply pitied.

CHAPTER X.

“Die Menschen kennen einander nicht leicht, selbst mit dem besten Willen und Vorsatz, nun tritt noch der böse Wille hinzu, der alles entstellt.”—GOETHE.

EDWIN TROUNCER had his father's thoroughly good-natured temperament; and among many glaring defects of character, this virtue shone—a rare degree of kindness.

Though it was his ambition to be a fashionable and fast young fellow, kindly nature would out; and while, with many a slang expression, he disclaimed any notion of doing it on principle, he really did interest himself warmly in the poor people living near, and did not mind how much trouble he took to help or please them. His sisters spoke of this as a kind of craze; looking

upon such concern for the poor as a curious taste, less intelligible than a love of fishing, and quite out of their way. They were never used to it in their earlier days, when living in a country town, and could not acquire so strange a habit now.

"What were they to say," Matilda would ask, "when they got into a cottage? Those low sort of people were always stupid, or deaf, or something; it was no use talking to them."

"But," remarked Helen, mildly, when speaking on the subject, "you heard all that was said in church last Sunday about charity—how do you dispose of those duties if you never go near the poor?"

"Why, with subscriptions, and old clothes, and all that; then, at Christmas, I did give old Mrs. Jones a comforter, and Susan Laycock had my fur tippet; it wasn't too moth-eaten to make into cuffs in one part, but I gave it to her. You talk as if one had nothing to do but to knit stockings for them and read tracts."

Helen was silent. Nothing more painfully reminded her of isolation than a saying like this. She had no inclination to argue or preach; for the difference of feeling between them seemed impassable.

Neither her aunt nor her cousins had more weight of character than children; their influence with Helen was nullified by the inconsistency of conduct and weakness of principle which results from spiritual negligences. Well-intentioned, but totally unpractised in self-denial,—shrewd, but mainly enlightened by self-interest,—their growth in moral excellence was constantly retarded by disorderliness of spiritual life. Conscience was still more weakened by the regularity of external religion to which they adhered; while within, bad feelings ran riot. Truly, for the most part, they knew not, while sinning, what they did; but they might have known, had they not habitually despised the aid of self-discipline, and shrunk from the toil of self-inspection. Their faults of manner

were the result of deeper faults, but disguise was what they attempted, not cure. If they had not been jealous of Helen, she might have helped them with her gentleness and candour; and they, while giving her the benefit of more practical experience, might have comforted her by true affection; but now they mutually vexed each other, and distrust gaining ground on both sides, all the weakest parts of character came into painful collision.

Probably it was for this very purpose, that Providence threw them together. Until Helen had been subjected to the roughings and humiliations of her present home, she could never have suspected the evil latent in her own heart, or have sought Divine help for rectifying its unimagined baseness and misery.

Some days after Edwin's return she was walking with Penelope in the garden, when he passed them, carrying a little jug in his hand.

"Doing the district visitor, you see!" he cried out.

"Oh, are you going into the village? I wish so much that I had some poor friends to go and see!"

Edwin stopped, and stared at her, incredulous.

"Do *you* go in for that sort of thing?" he inquired.

"I have been used to poor people all my life, and miss the occupation now. I wish I could be introduced to some here!"

"Oh, come along then with me; come, Pen! you may go too. The old bodies will be proud to see you."

And so they walked on together. Helen was pleased: she had been wishing for this so long, and shrunk from asking his sisters, lest it should seem a covert reproof for their indifference. She was pleased, and chatted quite merrily as they went down the village. His nature and hers were so radically unlike, that until to-day they had been unable to meet comfortably at any point, except over a joke. His errand of kindness to-day

was to an old woman, whom they found sitting shivering by a fire, though the day was warm,—so weak, that she seemed to prop herself against a sturdy little boy of about three years, who sat on her lap as on a throne.

“Is the little one ill too?” asked Helen.

“Bad in himself, but not catching,” replied his grandmother, in a confidential voice.

He did not look worse than sleepy and lumpish, reflectively digging currants out of a piece of cake he held in his hands, and hugging a whip at the same time, ready to hunt the cat with, as soon as he chose to alight.

Edwin Trouncer engaged himself ostensibly in talking to old Mrs. Laycock, but really he was talking for the amusement of Helen, whose presence had called his vanity into unseasonable play; and thus he caused great perplexity to the invalid, for his answers were aimed at something quite foreign to the subjects she spoke of.

Dimly conscious of the impertinence, she foiled

him with the dignity of meekness, and dropped the thread of discourse as soon as she could without showing offence.

“Perhaps the young lady and the little ’un will come and see me another day; they’ll be right welcome anywhen.”

Helen promised to do so; and they left the cottage, and went on to call at a few more. Her cousin’s tone was too invariably bantering to please her taste, but, on the whole, she liked him better that morning than she had before thought possible, and came home in high good-humour.

Mrs. Trouncer met them in the hall.

“The next time you mean to omit giving Bella her lesson, Helen, perhaps you will be so obliging as to name your intention beforehand.”

“Oh! I am sorry, aunt! I quite forgot her lessons. Really, I beg your pardon, for playing truant, but I was so glad to go and see the sick people in the village, that I never thought of the time.”

"Take off your bonnet, Penelope, this minute, and go to the nursery; don't stand staring so at me. I've no doubt Edwin made the walk very agreeable," replied Mrs. Trouncer, flashing a disdainful glance at her son, who was pretending to whistle; and then, flouncing back into the drawing-room, she obviously shut the door upon them both.

There was a warmth of indignation in her way of speaking about this trifle, which ought to have warned Helen that a deeper subject of vexation rankled within, unacknowledged. She could not guess what it was, and Edwin had turned from her, and was standing looking out in the doorway of the hall, with both hands plunged into his pockets; so being unable to look for any explanation in his face, she slowly went upstairs and got ready for luncheon.

When the bell summoned her downstairs, she heard loud angry tones as she opened the drawing-room door, and found Edwin looking chidden

and both his sisters suddenly mute. Evidently, they had been giving him an animated scolding; for he was nervously stroking his shirt-collar upwards, a trick which Helen had already learned to be a sign of embarrassment with him. But why was that weak simper upon his lips at the same time? As she was sure that for some reason or other he was in domestic disgrace, she took some pains to be more chatty and attentive to his nonsense than usual during luncheon-time. She even went against her inclinations so far, as to ask him to do her a service,—to find out in the postal guide which was the latest day for sending off the letter to her sister.

“I think to-morrow will do,” she said; “but I am not sure whether letters ought not to be in London by the nineteenth.”

“If you cannot look yourself Helen, Esther and I are equal to the trouble; Edwin is going out this afternoon, and won’t want to be hindered.”

“Oh, thank you; I need not really trouble any one, if you will lend me the book.”

She was smiling as she spoke, but felt quite stabbed by the rudeness of Matilda's tone. When people disturb the serenity of a very sweet-tempered person, they do more than annoy; they rob another of self-esteem; they throw the mind off its balance. Unused to this, it recovers with more difficulty than a rougher temper knows.

Unhappy Helen! She who had been nurtured until now in the confidence of affection, found herself stranded on alien ground—found herself scrutinized, and felt the force of the scriptural phrase, “He eyed him.” Her cousins eyed her from morning till night, wonderingly, suspiciously, and without the large allowance of love, or the just measure of penetration. By such notice, any one would be more or less paralysed. It affected her like an evil spell, so transforming her modes of conduct and feeling, that she began to feel a puzzle and a painful object to herself.

With discernment quickened by fear, she saw how little she was liked here; in what an ugly light her cousins' literal unkindness placed all she said and did, and, ever ready to sympathize, she began to take almost as low an estimate of herself, and adopt their disparaging views.

Truly, she was thankful for the excuse of her long letter to Mercy, as a reason for spending the afternoon alone. But over that letter, what tears! what musings! what lookings upwards to the invisible witness of *this* day, and the eighteenth of June last year! It was on this day, last year, that she and Arthur had allowed their hearts to speak,—just such a day as to weather; and the roses, the pinks, the day lilies opened under the same rejoicing sun. But she was now looking out on a formal little garden, barely hidden from a noisy road, and the oaks and beeches of Fernwick were spreading their deep shade for strangers.

“Oh, Arthur! if you remember the day, you

are not happier than I—" and then she fell to pitying him.

Kind fate hid from her the truth. At that moment Arthur was sleeping heavily in his digger's tent, after long vigils over a game of chance. He had lost, and declared with an oath that to-morrow night he would have his revenge. Did he forget the woman he had loved so passionately? Not for a day; but he pretended to do so. He tried to act as if he did, as he tried to act and feel as if there was no God of mercy allotting to man his griefs, and requiring of him to conquer, and win an everlasting crown. But the still small voice spoke within, though he would not heed its warnings; and Helen's sweet face came before him in sudden remembrance, and its grace and innocence smiled strangely on his darkened soul. From both he turned, with a pang of self-contempt and self-abhorrence; but not all his reckless despair could banish the meek visitants of love. The action of his conscience had been

much damaged by the early influences of home. Certain duties such as those of truth, charity, and all that men rank high under the name of honour, had never been called in question there, and these had unshaken hold upon him; but the duties of religious worship he had so constantly heard his father analyse and question, as a matter of philosophical interest,—as forms more resulting from differences of human opinion than from any superior obligation, that he had long ceased to consider them binding upon one who thought for himself.

Pure religion he believed, as his poor father had so often said, to be a spiritual life; and, therefore, he could not see the great importance of any peculiar system of belief. How could that which went on between his spirit and his God be settled into formulas of worship? and how could he tie up the revelations of the Eternal Spirit to his by any fixed creed which approved itself to the intelligence of man?

This was the tenor of his thoughts when he was last staying at Fernwick;—an exaggerated translation of his father's undefined belief. Then came the violent storm of passion, and he felt drifting without compass or anchor: his spiritual sense was numbed by sorrow; prayer seemed impossible when he was hopeless,—thanksgivings mockery,—and why ask resignation from the pitiless Ruler, in whose service, as he was told, the cruel blasting of his hope's became right? If *this* was thought right by devout people, there was some rottenness in their so-called devotion, and he would have done with it: his own manhood could support him, and he would scorn the passion which made his disappointment anguish, rather than cringe and sue for submissive feelings.

So pride spoke within him; and having allowed religious externals to fall into disuse, he had now no habits of devotion to protect its withering germ; and so from being released from all the ceremonials of religion, he began to find himself

free from its most essential restraints; he was no hypocrite, not he! Ah! but he *was* doing all he could to be godless. Having given himself no pledge of the sincerity of his religion by self-denials, he insensibly lost faith in the worth of the religion which at so cheap a rate he still called his own.

Merciful heaven! that secures for such a wanderer the effectual fervent prayers of many a righteous man! Helen's were patient and unwearying. It was heartsease to her to speak often of him to their God. That He saw them both, seemed to her an unalterable bond of union.

With regard to Mercy, she felt the same; but yet in her entire ignorance of Arthur's present way of living, she felt herself more one with him. Mercy never judged him fairly; Mercy had helped forward their separation; and as her thoughts reached this point, the tone of her letter became more superficial, and she said more about *things* than feelings. There was another reason

for this; she could not be so ungenerous as to tell her sister how unhappy she was in her relations with the Trouncers; it would be as much as to cast in her teeth, that for a second time, Mercy had influenced her lot with a mistaken judgment.

CHAPTER XI.

"The ghost of one bright hour
Comes from its grave, and stands before me now."

A. SMITH.

"Hélas ! hélas ! que les choses passent et les souvenirs demeurent !" —EUGÉNIE DE GUÉRIN.

THE next day was to be spent at Mrs. Lacey's. Helen would gladly have got off her part of the engagement, feeling little inclination to go, but she dared not moot the question of whether it were possible, lest she should give offence by a causeless change of purpose. Mrs. Trouncer was however in one of her sunniest moods ; she liked to spend a day among sociable neighbours, particularly when Mr. Trouncer could not be of the party, and Edwin was. And, notwithstanding

painful comparisons, it gratified her family pride to have at her side such an elegant-looking niece—a girl who would be distinguished in any company by the most refined beauty, and very graceful movement.

Meaning to heighten the effect of this, Mrs. Trouncer knocked at her door on the morning in question, and came in with a crape scarf, (once used at her own mother's funeral,) to propose, with many kind words, that Helen should accept it for wearing on this especial occasion, "since I know, my love, that your resources are not very ample; and this is a really good thing of its kind; so good that, as you see, I have saved it all these years, and never cut it up for trimmings."

A good, but not a fresh-looking thing, by any means. Helen's eye perceived its rusty tints, and her taste rebelled against wearing it, but hesitation was vain, taken for excessive modesty, and overpowered by loud assertions that she need not scruple to accept a good offer. She could only

have made her reasons for declining the honour intelligible, by roundly saying that she thought her own black shawl far more suitable and nice-looking; but this, for the sake of peace, she would not do, and so the scarf was worn.

Whenever Mrs. Trouncer had relieved her inclination to gore by all the sharp words and angry movements natural to her, she was particularly inclined to confer favours; not by way of compensation, for she seldom caught sight of the injustice and ugliness of her own tempers, but because the equilibrium of self-love was restored by a consciousness of producing strong impressions, and the warmth of a kind heart had then time to make itself felt. In these moods, she was terribly apt to make presents, and would sail into the room, all smiles, with some light-coloured handkerchief, or highly painted box, held out for Helen's acceptance, never doubting but that thus she could confer a pleasure.

It was really more difficult to Helen to receive

her favours than her hard words: meekness and self-command could reconcile her to these as a passive sufferer; with the other she had to simulate pleasure, when her taste was pained, and her whole will thwarted. But it did not do to show any reluctance, as this was sure to cause either another storm, or a more expensive present; since, as Mrs. Trouncer used to say to herself, "she seemed scarcely satisfied with the other." She thought the scarf in no way open to objection, and as Helen sat beside her in the carriage, driving to Mrs. Lacey's, gave it several affectionate little pattings.

"Let me tie your bonnet for you, Helen. Do you know you made a grandmother's knot in your strings?"

Everything done or said in human society is more or less a cypher, representing unseen, but clearly recognized sums of incalculable value for making people either glad or sorry. This most trifling touch of kind attention brought something

like exhilaration to Helen's impressible spirits: she so much needed affection that even a semblance of being tenderly cared for was soothing. She had felt of late as if there was no longer any one to take a pride in her; a privation of which no woman who has *not* known it can tell the desolating effect. What had been the joy and pride of her former associates was now the cause of jealousy and envy,—evil passions of which she had only recently begun to know the symptoms. To-day, she was all the more grateful for pleasant treatment, because when she had sent off her monthly budget to Mercy, she felt as if she had made a fresh parting. So long as the sheets were being finely covered for her dear sister's eye, a shadow of nearness seemed to exist. The incoming mails had not yet been announced and so soon as she was thrown with the strangers in Mrs. Lacey's grounds, and far enough from the hearing of either of her relations who could say, "Why do you ask? have you friends out there?"—her first

question by way of small talk was, "Can you tell me, are the Australian mails in yet?" What an intensity of hope hung upon that question! Arthur could have written by this time.

By the constant effort to keep down purely personal feelings, and to avoid every sign of dejection for the sake of other people, a slight sense of satisfaction may certainly be gained. This is almost all some troubled hearts can know of social enjoyment. It was all Helen had now. If attentions, if tacit admiration, could have gladdened her, it might have been otherwise. Mrs. Lacey introduced her to every one worth knowing on the field, and many took advantage of the introduction; but all the show of happiness around her made her heart more ravenous for lost delight. Talking and smiling under the trees in a long field where some of the school-children were dancing to a crazy fiddle, and some playing at cricket, Helen felt like an actor. As such, Matilda regarded her, though in a different way.

“How languid and *dégagée* Helen looks, Esther, with Lord Robert Hayes standing all the time at her side; how I hate affectation! Depend upon it, she knows what she is about, as well as any one, though she puts on that absent air,—interesting no doubt?”

Matilda would have saved herself a good deal of backbiting in detail, if she had simply said at once that she did not like Helen,—that her presence made her uncomfortable, and that her gentleness failed to please *her*. But though not admiring it in theory, she paid her the questionable compliment of a sort of imitation. So did Esther, “mincing as they went” in public. Helen would fain have told them that their natural manner, with all its roughness and *gaucherie*, was far less unpleasing than the guarded, softened tone they now and then adopted with an idea of being more correct and acceptable. They had not wisdom enough to see that nature and truth are always preferred to made-up manners. And

through these her fine spiritual ear caught the harsh twang of self-assertion, of vanity so craving for its food as to snatch and give itself all it could under any possible pretext.

Such a day as this, was a field-day for Trouncer's vanity. Edwin was their idea of manly perfection, and had declared himself "quite the cheese" when he gave his light locks their last brush before starting. He it was, who helped to man the boat in which Helen and two Miss Laceys were, when they went on the water after dinner: he undertook the genial jocosity department, and spared no pains to make his cousin smile.

It was evening, about an hour from the time of sunset, when the water-party returned to the home grounds, and found the whole school assembled for tea-drinking. Finding herself very faint beside Edwin in the crowd, Helen took his arm, and with the imperative decision of extreme bodily weakness, asked him at once to take her

somewhere where she could rest in quiet by herself. "Anywhere out of the way. Is not that a seat under the ash tree beyond the sunk fence? Yes, that will do."

Her tone startled him. She, so retiring and unexacting, to claim his care thus? He did not know what physical debility exacts, nor could he imagine that mere support might in moments of excessive fatigue appear a greater necessity than being dignified: but he moved off with her, as she desired, feeling embarrassed and looking rather sheepish, for he had to pass where his mother stood with Esther. Fortunately, their attention was otherwise engrossed, and he got his convoy to her shady resting-place without hindrance. Edwin was one of those good-natured fellows who never quite know whether they are in love or not; and he had got into so many entanglements in consequence of this unexclusive sensibility, that he was always a little afraid of being misunderstood. He, therefore, felt quite

nervous as he stood beside Helen, who only thanked him with a weary smile, and begged him to return to the others. He was not even as good-natured as a stranger might have been, for he dared not offer to bring her any tea there, but rather awkwardly inquired if she was sure there was nothing else she wanted.

"Only to be left alone, thank you. Pray go."
And, pulling hard at his whiskers, he went.

The garden in which she sat was glowing in full midsummer beauty, and all the blossoms hung in, what to her eye appeared, a serene self-seclusion. The boughs were spreading in evening sunshine,—the daisies, that had been open in a trance of vegetable bliss for long hours of unclouded brightness, undisturbed by anything except a lazy moth or a bee, touching here and there in quest of honey-flowers,—were now folded up, and she, longing to be as calm, as deeply satisfied with nature as they, sat among her flower-friends perplexed and troubled.

The confusions of human folly had been before her all day; a clamour of children noisy with the expectation of happiness, but often restless with vanity and wayward tempers; whilst their elders, each bearing in heart a world of private experience, were passing and repassing in a hurry of excitement with which Helen could not sympathize;—tempers ruffled; annoyance at missings or undesired meetings; anxiety about trifles; mortification of feelings too narrow and self-ended to be frankly uttered, taking forms of irony; silence covering chagrin; and complaints of the heat accusing even the blue sky.

The gaily-dressed people in the field before her, represented happiness, and at a little distance the children looked as bright and active as innocent thoughts, but she had the gift of seeing inner life as well as surfaces, and to-day surface joy could not long delude her.

When the sun sank, and the dew fell on the speechless inhabitants of the garden, she gazed on

them with envy. Though she was of *kin* to them, *through the Creator*, yet then not even the rose or the white lily could speak comfortably to her eye; and oh! when the evening breeze began to ruffle the uppermost branches,—to stir the distant trees now black against an amber horizon,—she felt a captive, and when it passed freshly over her cheek on its way to the brightening evening star, she felt so lonely, so sure that it passed over no district where one heart beat that understood hers, that she thought God *must* give especial heed and pity to a child so orphaned and forlorn.

Loud and repeated cheers, ringing clear in the stillness of evening, told her that the business of that day of pleasure was ending, and the children were being dismissed. She wondered that no one came near her; for anything her cousins knew to the contrary, she might have fainted or fallen with weariness. Ah! when Helen felt this kind of neglect, so new to her, she bitterly reproached herself for days, when in her own

dear home, she had complained of little slights *not* intentional,—little mortifications resulting from accident or oversight, not from suppressed malice, which now she had unhappily too much reason to suspect.

Together with the consciousness that she was no longer a person of any importance, came the more painful knowledge that those with whom she was living were seeking to make her feel it. The words, so often in Matilda's mouth, "she really ought to learn her true position," had not reached her ears, but the feeling which prompted such an expression stung her every day, and would probably have caused less pain had it been fairly uttered. For Matilda, feeling it to be a virtuous effort to restrain her tongue from ungentle words, made compensation to herself by hints, and intimations manifold; yet, with so smooth a manner and in such ambiguous phraseology, that there was nothing to take hold of, and no ostensible unkindness to resent. On

this occasion, neglect had been carried on under cover of cousinly affection. Helen was, of course, missed and inquired for, and Mrs. Trouncer had many questions about her to answer, but when any one proposed to take her tea, or to see if she had recovered and would rejoin the party, Matilda was prompt to interfere, and to beg that she might remain undisturbed, she had charged Edwin to see that she was left alone. Both Matilda and Esther made no doubt that her motive in withdrawing was a plan for quiet flirtation with their brother, and this idea gave a vivacity to their injunctions that she should be left quite alone.

It is a sad conclusion to come to, that whatever is not intelligible in the conduct of another person, is usually attributed to some unworthy motive; but human nature is apt to pay itself this ill compliment; a leaning to accusation in every form may be remarked from tenderest infancy, and as soon as a little girl can speak to her doll,

she calls it naughty and thinks it needs a whipping.

When Matilda went into the garden to fetch her cousin, the pale face and cold hand overthrew her unkind theories, and she began to believe that Helen had really felt unwell.

"The carriage is ready, Helen. Mamma and I thought you had better be left quite quiet, but won't you have something before you go? Mrs. Lacy has been worrying us to get you to take a glass of wine, but I knew you wouldn't.

"Oh, no, thank you, I only want rest; I am glad it is time to go."

Her cousin was chagrined to be leaving without seeing more of a person who had sat next her at dinner, and did not believe this; but she knew nothing, and she dreamed nothing of the remembrances that had been occupying Helen's thoughts all day; and as they drove home, *vis-à-vis*, the moonlight was not falling on Helen's face, and she never detected her tears.

"I cannot think," said Mrs. Trouncer to her husband on their return, in a confidential tone, "what unkind report has been spread about poor Esther; *some one* must have spoken against her to Mrs. Lacy, or she would not have been slighted as she was—introduced to no one new, and literally scarcely spoken to all the evening."

But who could have reported against Esther Trouncer anything worse than what her face told of spiteful temper and limited intellect? Besides, her manner!—for whatever fault or weakness has free course at home never fails to make a visit too with the would-be pleasant guest. It may be somewhat snubbed into obscurity by the will, but one might as well try to conceal the scent of peppermint lozenges as the traces of customary evil; while we smile, it frowns; while we soften the voice, it snarls out; while we attempt rigid self-restraint, it makes many a sly snatch at its usual prey; and still "the show of their countenances witnesses against" those who would fain

appear beautiful outwardly, but take too little heed of that inward rightness which, when habitually practised, is the beauty of the Lord God being upon us.

CHAPTER XII.

“Ce que je vous raconte en quelques mots n'est, bien entendu, que le très court abrégé de longues, obscures, et multiples souffrances. . . . Or le seule mérite de ces longues journées de pur ennui, c'était un degré de plus où de moins dans les mouvemens de vie que je sentais en moi. Toute circonstance où je me reconnais, plus d'ampleur de forces, plus de sensibilité, plus de mémoire, où ma conscience, pour ainsi dire, était d'un meilleur timbre et résonnait mieux, tout moment de concentration plus intense où d'expansion plus tendre, était un jour à ne jamais oublier.”

E. FROMENTIN.

Few things are more disagreeable than voluntary looks; they tacitly accuse, lament, or reproach, without causing any sympathy for the emotion thus represented. When the next morning at breakfast Mrs. Trouncer sat over her letters, looking unspeakably perplexed and discouraged, no one who saw her face felt much concern for her, since the evident volition she exercised

in thus trying to trouble her companions gave the idea of a person who was quite able to subdue the expression of her own feelings if she chose. Clearly these looks were neither more nor less than an instrument of annoyance. But, finding it ineffectual—for Edwin continued to cut jokes, and his father and sisters to laugh at them, Mrs. Trouncer was reduced to the more certain method of angry complaint.

“Very inconsiderate, I must say! The pleasure of coming, forsooth! Profit would have been nearer the mark.”

“What’s up now, mother?” asked Edwin.

“Oh! only that your sister promises us the pleasure of a visit, and of course the old tribe comes too—dear Henry needs change of air. Really, Trouncer, I don’t know what *you* think, but *I* do not feel that my health *can* stand our house being made a convalescent hospital much longer. If Lorimer needs change of air he should go to the sea.”

"No doubt, my dear, but he needs the ready still more."

"Then he should ask his cousin, Mr. Chadleigh, for it. I'm sure he could afford whatever he chose."

"When do they come?" inquired Matilda.

"Why, of all days in the year, the very day before John and Augusta planned to come; of course *they* must be put off—our house can't hold *every* one——"

(Helen's toast seemed to choke her at that moment.)

"Poor John must wait dear Henry's convenience, of course; a brother is nothing in the world to Jane compared to her husband."

"Nonsense," said Edwin; "why shouldn't the Lorimers come when John and Augusta leave?"

"Why they have got his cousin, Mr. Chadleigh, to provide a man to do duty the Sunday after next at Grailedge, so, of course, they must come then."

“Grailedge!” Helen exclaimed; “then it must be the husband of my friend, Mrs. Chadleigh, that you are speaking of, for they live near there. Is Mr. Chadleigh a first cousin of your son-in-law, uncle?”

“Yes, and a very influential cousin too—got him the living of Grailedge. His estate surrounds the parish.”

“The starving *I* call it,” Edwin interposed.

“Well, nine young ones to feed on three hundred a year *is* tight work; but they have help one way or other.”

“I shall like to see any one coming from that part of the world,” said Helen, while she felt as if some great piece of good luck had befallen her: and as soon as she could catch her aunt’s flashing eye, tried to divert the current of her thoughts by reminding her of the elderly Miss Ashcroft she had seen at Fernwick.

“That was Mrs. Chadleigh’s aunt; and Mrs.

Chadleigh herself was one of our most intimate friends."

"I'm glad to hear it, my dear, but pray don't detain me now," rising from the table as she spoke; "you see I have everything to look to; *other* people have time to amuse themselves whatever has to be done, so *some* one must take the wear and tear of life."

She left the room with loud exit, and Mr. Trouncer, to whom her words were really addressed, went on reading his newspaper. Mrs. Trouncer had the daily provocation of a husband too good-humoured to mind her taunts. All that day whenever he was at leisure, it was her object to make him feel the outrageous injury done to her by his eldest daughter in proposing a visit before John and his bride had made theirs. But when she was aiming reproachful glances at him, he was mantling with smiles, or quietly looking another way; and when by her marked disregard of the curious legal anecdotes he was telling at dinner,

she tried to communicate to him a sense of her displeasure, the good man never seemed aware of her intention. And so, with all his kindness, he caused her the keenest disappointment. If he had but asked her if she was out of spirits, or if anything was going wrong in their household, it would have been such a relief to her temper; but, really, to see him going on just the same whether she smiled or frowned, like a person who, knowing that an eclipse is going on, does not even take the trouble to look out of window, was too provoking.

Edwin's high spirits were like oil to the family machinery at this time; provided that he did not "make himself ridiculous with Helen"—(*i. e.*, open the door, pick up a glove, or gather a rose for her); he kept both Matilda and Esther in gay good-humour, and now and then administered those wholesome checks to Arabella's vanity and Marmaduke's cubbishness, which are so particularly welcome to people who cannot punish or reprove with impunity them-

selves. Mrs. Trouncer recovered her spirits and good temper when three days later she heard again from Jane, that they only wished to bring their youngest girl with the eldest, who always was her maid. This, with Helen's eager proposal to vacate her own room for one in the attic story, brought back the tide of her aunt's good-nature, and soon all the black shoals of selfishness were hidden in a sparkling rush of sociable feelings. Even the conjunction of the newly married pair with their other guests, was now considered possible for one or two days. Edwin would sleep in the village, and the nursery arrangements admit of condensation for a few nights at least.

"My dear, it will enable us to have the children all together round our table," said Mrs. Trouncer with swimming eyes. "We must not mind a little inconvenience for their happiness," (so her husband had thought from the first,) "and dear Edwin can so seldom see us all together. I'm sure no one, who knew the blessing of family

union, would forfeit the happiness of family gatherings now and then."

How ignorant of human nature was Helen when she marvelled to hear these effusions of good-will. Now that feather-beds and mattresses had been adjusted to meet all requirements; and sundry small difficulties removed as to nursery accommodations, by Jane's discreet selection of children for the visit, it was the most natural thing possible for her aunt's warm heart to spring away from past annoyance, and to grasp the luxury of good feeling with total forgetfulness of all she had said and felt before.

A bad temper brings on convulsions of unkind feeling, but as soon as these subside, the patient is only conscious of her truer better self.

Mr. and Mrs. Lorimer and their two children arrived; Helen stayed in her room the afternoon they were expected, fearing to be in the way: and so she did not see the new comers till just before dinner. Mrs. Lorimer had a quietness of

manner and an air of inward pre-occupation which made her look very lady-like beside her sisters and step-mother; a mild expression of face and soft voice also attracted Helen. She was dressed with some taste, though with obvious economy, and apologized to her mother for wearing a neat morning cap; "you know we scarcely ever dine out now," was her plea.

Of Mr. Lorimer, Helen could give herself little account, except that he was certainly a gentleman, though he had rather an awkward want of self-possession, and an anxious solicitude to please, when he joined in conversation: but he was out of health and that, she thought, probably made him nervous in a large party. Before dinner was announced, a little girl showing all the *insouciance* of four years old, was ushered into the room by a young sister about fourteen—bony and pale, and very like a grasshopper in length and sharpness of elbow. Both coasted up to their mother, under the unblinking stare of Arabella and

Penelope, who were conscious of widely spreading sprigged muslin frocks; and not admiring their cousin's lilac prints.

Helen soon allured the youngest child to her lap, and after dinner, made successful advances towards her sister; offering to show her a book of engravings, and drawing out a few disconnected remarks, but these surprised her,—they were the sayings of an experienced woman rather than of a young girl.

“Laura must not go out, please, unless I go and put on her boots; she had croup the week before last.”

“Indeed, poor little thing; were you not sadly frightened?”

“Oh no, I have nursed nearly all of us through it. Teddy has it every winter.”

“And how old is Teddy?”

“Oh, he's six, next month. We want him to go to school, but it's too expensive to send him anywhere out of the village.”

Her mother caught something of what she was saying, and took a chair beside Helen; she hoped Miss Raymond was not tiring herself by holding Laura; from that point it was easy to slip into conversation, and get upon the subject most interesting to her—Beatrice and her husband and home.

Did Mrs. Lorimer think her happy?

“She has every thing to make her so, that eye can see, and her husband, as we know, is most kind.”

The words conveyed no assurance, but Helen could not push her inquiry farther, and merely said,

“Anything you can tell me about her is interesting to me; she was never a good correspondent, and since her marriage hardly ever writes. I wish she would, I can ill spare a friend now!”

This in lower tones and with a sigh. Helen *thought* she loved Beatrice better than she really

did or could; loved her as part of a happy past, of a time which now seemed so entirely blotted out from all remembrance but her own, so that she clung to anything or anybody that could connect the present with it.

"You were great friends, I understand," said Mrs. Lorimer.

"Oh, she was constantly at Fernwick, and my sister and I often passed the day at her home."

"Then you have seen much more of her than I ever have, and must know her better. I seldom am inside her house, and I believe she has called on us twice."

"But does she not ask you to come?"

"Rarely; and when she has, Henry has been disinclined to go."

"Indeed! He is Mr. Lorimer's cousin, I think."

"Yes; but, you know, all cousins are not like yours."

A remark which awakened in Helen's thoughts the rejoinder, "Thank heaven, no;" for during the few minutes' talk that had passed, Esther had been watching them, sullenly expectant, and now came up to her sister and drew her away, saying something in under-tones about not letting her be absorbed *all* the evening; and Helen was left to think what it was that had caused distance between such near relations at Grailledge. Certainly, there was nothing for Beatrice to object to in the manners of the Lorimers. She was sitting a little apart from the others as the summer twilight deepened. Mr. Lorimer was nearest to her, fidgeting the leaves of a book which she was sure he had not light for reading; but she would not begin to talk to him for fear lest that, too, should seem to her cousins an encroachment.

They did not often blame her, but she felt an instinctive certainty that she was continually expected to be blameworthy, and, to perceive

this expectation, affects the spirits almost as much as outspoken censure.

What an unimaginable change for Helen was this state of things! Until now, her life had been picturesque, and herself and all her surroundings admired and made much of. In the neighbourhood of Fernwick, all she had done and said had a certain interest: there she was *somebody* in virtue of her position, and the reputation of wit and beauty had made her smiles worth winning. Now it was far otherwise: she was *nobody* in social parlance, and her natural attractions were a hindrance to domestic peace. By many indescribable symptoms, she was made aware that her conduct was seen from a cold and ugly point of view,—that she was watched with disliking suspicious scrutiny, as one who was full of unjust pretension and irresistible wiles. Esther even accused her of trying to alienate the affections of her father, and, on the strength of this fear, gave way to her own disagreeable tempers

more than ever. It was a preposterous notion, but the object of our dislike is as invariably idealized as the object of our fondest admiration.

After an evening spent at the outside of an uncongenial circle, Helen went wearily to bed; but, before she prepared for sleep, she took out a letter from Miss Ashcroft, which had come some days before, and read it twice over. "Charles was at home, and sadly depressed;" and, further on, "poor Charles would like to be very kindly remembered, but I do not care to open old wounds by telling him who I am writing to."

"There was a great deal that was very nice and good in that poor fellow," thought Helen; "what would he say, if he had seen me this evening! He would not have believed it."

But another train of ideas occupied her mind longer—ideas that began and ended with the thought, "This day fortnight the Australian mail must be in."

CHAPTER XIII.

"Le monde est rempli de gens qui portent des sons à l'oreille sans rien dire à l'esprit."—MDE. DE LAMBERT.

"Que le fardeau des jours semble léger pour eux !" —LAMARTINE.

JANE LORIMER was a good and loveable creature, as Helen soon found; but a tedious woman to spend a long day with, being wholly a mother, and manifestly given up to the meditations and interests of a maternal nature. Still it was a pleasant change to live a week with some one whom she could be kind to without having any repugnance to overcome; and Mr. Lorimer, too, as she came to know him better, she liked very much: he was thoughtful and well read, and often kept conversation a little above the

Trouncer level, when the enjoyment of intellectual sympathy released him from the cramping gyves of nervousness. He quickly found that Helen hailed his powers of mind as a temporary emancipation; he noticed in her manner the diffidence which must shackle a fine mind among unappreciating natures of an entirely different sort, and tried to give her self-love an unperceived cordial. Seldom was one more needed: while her cousins thought her silent from pride or contempt, her spirit was biting the dust in abject humiliation.

Matilda and Esther were too much occupied by their own unappeased wishes and irremediable wants, to have any thought or imagination of hers. People who feel and act unkindly are generally those who suffer from inward poverty of some sort or other; who are stung with self-dislike, or an obscure sense of spiritual destitution; and, from *their* point of view, no one else can need relief or deserve pity so much as themselves. From

their point of view!—oh, if we could judge of every one's actions from that variable and delusive position, on whom would censure fall with anything like severity?

But Helen could not see herself with her cousins' restless eyes, and so she often wondered that they did not pity her more. She fancied that, in their place, she should have been so kind to herself, so considerate and tender; but then she "knew the heart of the stranger," and they did not. This knowledge made her very grateful for a kind look and gentle words. From Mrs Lorimer she got many. Her little fatling, Laura, had settled her affections on "the pretty lady" from the first hour, and cried to go to her whenever they were in the same room; and the elder child, Lucy, thought it the greatest treat possible to be allowed to sit by her while she was drawing, and watch how she did it, or to learn from her a new stitch in netting.

As Helen soon discovered, the old-hearted

young girl had already had more of hard work than of play during her short life, and her appetite for pleasure was, therefore, keen and not at all fastidious.

"You must not spoil our steady little daughter, Miss Raymond," observed Mr. Lorimer one day, when he saw Helen take some plain work from her, and advise her to go out and join the other children in the garden. "She is used to help her mother."

"Yes, and mamma must have the little shirts by October," replied Lucy, gravely, "and I have all the flannels to make, too."

"I want some of them," said Helen, smiling, "as well as the little shirts, and while I am helping you, it will help me on in learning to do plain needlework nicely. Run out, dear, the birds are singing merrily, and you should be merry with them;" adding, as Lucy closed the door behind her, "That child looks to me as if she needed happiness so much."

"So we all do by rights," said Mr. Lorimer.

"Ah, yes! but at our age it is different. We have learned to do without."

The sickly, careworn man glanced at her smooth forehead and shining curls, incredulous. "Some passing love affair," he thought. "What does she know of the anxiety and sorrow that consumes our very hearts—the care that increases every year!"

And both were silent. Helen had detected that Mr. Lorimer was

"Doomed to that sorest task of man alive,
To make three guineas do the work of five,*"

and she had, in many a graceful disguise conveyed to his mind, and Mrs. Lorimer's, the expression of her deepest sympathy. But until now she had never felt the want of money so much. She passionately desired to give something useful to each of the children, and could only spend a few shillings upon their many needs. Yet she

* Burns.

could not altogether pity the Lorimers. It was evidently such a delight to them both to be together. She noticed the eager pleasure on Jane's face whenever they found opportunity for slipping into the garden by themselves; it was clear that all the privations and anxieties of their married life had not made her love languid—that their hearts were satisfied and at rest. She saw it, and thought of Arthur. What penury could trouble her, if once she had the wealth of his presence! So they think and feel who have not yet entered the battle which poetry cannot describe.

The day for the family gathering came in one of the hottest glooms of summer, and Helen sat at her uncle's dinner-table with the voice of all his children in her ears. She had come down with the valiant resolution to sustain cheerfulness, at all risks of heartache, for her uncle's sake. In his own coarse-grained fashion he was invariably kind to her, and she would not mar his pleasure now by looking sadder than the rest.

"My sixth daughter, John," he said as she entered; "a fine child for the youngest."

Helen felt the kindness meant, and smiling gratefully, gave him the rose she had intended for Lucy to wear."

Neither of the party *meant* to make her feel an alien, and she would try to be one of them; and no one at table guessed that the sweet merriment of her gaiety was the reaction from profound melancholy, and that it was brought about by high principle. Sometimes she would fall into her own vein of delicate humour, and say things which any person of cultivated taste must have appreciated; but now, Mr. Lorimer being at the other end of the table, her jokes were as little heeded as the spring flowers that bloom here and there in an autumn season, beneath the fading leaves of their April contemporaries; neither were looked for nor gathered; and "a jest's prosperity lies in the ear of him that hears it."

She amused herself meanwhile, by comparing family physiognomies, for to-day all the children dined downstairs; and Arabella, sitting beside her married half-brother opposite, bore a singular resemblance to that earliest sprout of the Trouncer tree.

John Trouncer himself looked quite beaming with prosperity and self-complacency: he made Edwin appear almost crest-fallen by contrast; for, besides having burly health, he had just married a rich wife, and affluence emphasized his every word and gesture. Helen had observed that as soon as they sat down, his eye singled her out for attention—attention to himself; and this, perhaps, is the most flattering mark of esteem that a very vain man can bestow upon a stranger; but she found it much pleasanter to look at the patient face and unassuming demeanour of his sister Jane.

Usually, when the Trouncers did talk among themselves, it was either a wrangle of loudly

asserted difference of opinion, or a general clack of consentient feeling, animated by strong party spirit or softened by twaddle; of conversation, properly so called, they had no idea. To-day, however, there was a good deal of energetic talking. Mrs. John Trouncer, of whom Helen saw nothing, as she sat on the same side, kept up a lively chatter. She had just returned from the Continent, and she talked about all she had done and seen without stint; completely shutting up poor Mr. Lorimer by an inapposite reproach for his never having taken his wife abroad, (asking *Johnny* if it was not really too bad of him?) and twice cut short a heavy pun which her father-in-law had been talking up to for some minutes.

In fact, she covered all the ground, and gave Mrs. Trouncer time to attend with thorough satisfaction to the material interests of her guests. When the cloth was removed and healths were to be drunk, there was a pause, for the master

of the house was obviously claiming silence for a speech. A clumsy speech, but full of warm-hearted affection, and his wife was wiping her eyes before it ended. John had to return thanks, and the allusions he made to the parental hearth, seemed quite too much for his father. There was so loud a use of his pocket-handkerchief, that Helen could not believe that *he* heard a word more of what was being said, but his daughters did, and before their brother sat down, their lips began to tremble and their eyes to blink. Such a demonstration of feeling greatly surprised Helen; the Trouncers were in general so obtuse and inexpressive, and why they should cry now, was past the comprehension of her more reserved nature. The habits of the lymphatic temperament were new to her.

Marmaduke was finally summoned to make his speech, and then followed an outburst of laughter, quite as uncalled-for and as strange (to Helen's understanding) as the previous tears had

been; and the room was getting hotter and hotter as it grew dark, and her weary heart heavier. She sat among them perfectly silenced by their bad taste. Nothing, perhaps, puts a more impassable gulf between one person and another than any extreme discord of taste. You may hope for a passing unkindness to be repented of, but who repents of having jarred every nerve of a sensitive nature with coarse fun or self-gratulatory jests expressive of vulgar triumph? In this house she had seldom any respite from distaste. Its inmates contrived to make both seriousness and hilarity equally repelling. Perhaps the gayer moods were the worst.

The rest of the evening passed more pleasantly, for John and his bride occupied Mrs. Trouncer and her daughters, and so Helen could talk to Mr. and Mrs. Lorimer as much as she liked. It was their last evening, and she was making the most of the time. She longed to send messages by them to Beatrice, for words trans-

mitted *vivâ voce* seem to bring the absent nearer ; but she saw from Mrs. Lorimer's manner, whenever Beatrice was spoken of, that this would be undesirable.

"I should be so happy to welcome you to our home," said his wife, "but if you saw it, you would understand in a moment why we cannot ask you to come. However, if you do come to see your friend, I trust we may have the pleasure of a call : Grailedge is not so much as a mile from the Chadleighs."

Helen promised to do so, determining in her own mind that she would not be long in their neighbourhood without bringing Beatrice and Mrs. Lorimer into more friendly relations. There was some misunderstanding, no doubt, and this a mutual friend could often succeed in clearing up.

"Will you sometimes write to me a letter with a picture of a pig and cousin Eddy's horse ?" cried little Laura from her mother's lap, the next

morning as they were driving off; and Helen was as much pleased with the request as if some boon had been granted to herself. A heart long kept upon a low diet of love is as thankful for a child's caress as a hungry outcast for bread.

The Lorimers were gone, and, as Helen hoped, somewhat richer than they came. Mr. Trouncer and his son-in-law had come out of the dining-room, after a private conference just before they went away; and the husky voice of the elder man while trying to be humorous at the carriage door, and the flushed face, and anxious thanks of the other, led their sympathetic observer to the conclusion that a subsidy had been given.

The pleasure she found in this discovery enabled her that day to laugh at her uncle's worst jokes with unfeigned relish. After all, what a good-hearted old fellow he was; why should she mind such surface defects as his, more than the cut of his tawny gaiters, and rather obtrusive waistcoats?

She had another help to cheerfulness in the fact that Edwin was going away for the rest of the vacation in a few days; and meanwhile Mrs. John Trouncer almost silenced his "chaffing" by her small talk. She was, in a certain style, pretty; but, without what one calls vulgarity, so common-looking; and in all her appointments, so clearly made up by fashion, that Helen felt not the slightest interest in her society. Indeed, she avoided it as much as she could without rudeness.

The following day, she retreated from the garden, where most of the party were idling after breakfast, and was looking for her book in the drawing-room, when Edwin strolled in, and asked her if she knew where Matilda had put his new pocket-handkerchiefs? No, but she would look in her work-table: and there they lay at the top of the drawer.

"Untouched! just exactly as I left them. Tiresome creature! Now, when I'm going to-

morrow, I do think she might have put on the steam a little. Only look, twelve handkerchiefs, and not one hemmed, and I got them and begged her to do them a week ago!"

"She must have forgotten them."

"Not she! It's all laziness—and she will be telling me she has had no time."

"Your new sister must occupy her a good deal, of course; but I have plenty of time; I shall soon get through some of these, for it is all straight sailing."

And so saying, she took one out of the drawer, sat down with her work-basket, and began to turn down the hem.

"Oh, thank you, cousin; it's most excessively kind of you, but I'm not quite sure—you see it makes a fellow feel uncommonly flattered, and so forth; but it's rather awkward, to——"

"Awkward to hem a handkerchief," said Helen, turning calm eyes upon his smirking face; "what can make it awkward?"

"Why, you see,—the looks of the thing,—you may be sure I feel proud of the honour you do me, but it might make people talk; in short, if you don't mind, I would rather my sisters didn't see you hemming those,—it might lead to misunderstandings."

He was so befooled with conceit that his voice actually trembled with nervousness.

At his first words Helen had been inclined to laugh outright; as he stammered on, and spoke more earnestly, amusement gave way to profound indignation and scorn; her cheeks flushed crimson, and that flush embarrassed her for an instant, but recovering herself as quickly, she looked steadily in his foolish self-conscious face, and said,—

"Either I totally miss your meaning, or you are making an inconceivable mistake yourself. If you do not wish me to do this work, you may be quite sure I do not: as for what misunderstanding hemming a silk pocket-handkerchief might occasion, I cannot be responsible for those or any

other hallucinations. Pray not another word about it; be so good as to lay this with the others," (and she gave him the carefully folded handkerchief,) "and before you leave the room, I shall be obliged if you would open the windows. The air here is stifling."

"You're not offended with me, cousin?"

"Offended? oh dear, no, but I was going to read when you came in, and do not care to be longer interrupted."

"I really had no idea of giving you pain when I spoke!"

"I did not imagine that you could." And she began to read.

"I wish you would assure me that I am forgiven."

She went on reading, or pretending to read, but as still he did not go away, she said without raising her eyes, "When you have left the room, you may take that for granted." She longed to be able to add "and forgotten too," but this truth forbade.

That Edwin should have supposed the feelings, or even the suspicion of the feelings he hinted at, stung her pride intolerably. To her he had always appeared like a man who could barely pass for a gentleman, and the hypothesis that *she* could have been fascinated by such a being had never before crossed her mind as imaginable. It was quite bad enough to have him calling her cousin—by courtesy—but to see him giving himself these preposterous airs of modesty was past endurance. “If he was not going away for months to come,” thought she, “I would not stay another week; I would ask Mr. Heathcote, the Frasers, Beatrice, *anybody*, to house me,—such insults are not to be borne.”

For she was now passionately excited, and too deeply mortified to regard what had just happened in a reasonable light. Her common sense would have passed it over with a smile; her heart, sore with vain hope, could not.

Still Edwin lingered, uneasily fingering the

things that lay on the table beside him, and failing to attract the least glance from Helen, muttered in a sulky tone, "I never meant to make you uncomfortable, I'm sure; perhaps you'll be so good as not to mention what has passed between us."

But she maintained the deep silence of contempt, and quietly turning her page, persuaded herself that she read. Whereupon he went out of the room, banging the door after him. As soon, however, as his defiant whistle had died away in the hall, and she had continued in studious attitude long enough to satisfy her idea of dignity, she went to her room, and calmed herself by slow degrees over some of Mercy's old letters, and her Bible. For even this affront must, she well knew, be brought under the jurisdiction of Christ. His meek and lowly heart must still the uproar of hers.

When it was again necessary for her to appear downstairs, she had conquered herself so far as to be able to speak to the offender quite pleasantly.

She would have disdained herself for anything like resentment or embarrassment in her manner; and by asking him kindly where he was going to stop the next day, she relieved his sneaking spirits more than she intended. He said to himself that after all there *was* a secret liking for him in that proud woman, let her say what she would.

A visitor like Mrs. John Trouncer promotes good-humour by her own happy self-complacency; but at the same time, as she trips merrily through the often troubled arena of home life, she stumbles against many a tender point, and capers unconsciously upon mined ground; which, at other times, might explode at the lightest touch. So it was during this visit of hers. With a beaming smile, she would say to her sisters-in-law, "Miss Raymond is perfectly lovely, she makes us all look like gipsies beside her!" or to Mrs. Trouncer, "What a pleasure it must be to Matilda and Esther to have such an accomplished girl for their constant companion!" as heedless of disagreeing

looks on the face of her listener, as of low sighs from Helen when she addressed her with equal kindness of intention and deficiency of tact. "How fortunate it is, dear Miss Raymond, that you can live here and fill Jane Lorimer's place: you quite enliven the house, I am sure; and they are all *so* kind, are they not? such an attached family! I'm sure I feel it quite a privilege to be one of them."

A guarded smile and no word spoken told *her* nothing; and she would run on, while her crochet hook glanced in and out of an intricate web. "I hope you will come and see us some day, if you can be *spared*. I was saying to dear John that we must ask you. You must know he admires you vastly, and I am not jealous!"

The silly good-natured laugh that accompanied her voluble rattle told of light-hearted enjoyment and a natural incapacity for sorrow. Helen's spirits were just then feeling so heavy and broken down, that she could almost have consented to

change natures, to win for a day or two some freedom from all that oppressed and paralyzed her own. She did not feel inclined for the transformation at dinner time, when the merry little woman expressed as much appreciation of what she liked among eatables, as she had before manifested about Helen's fair looks, and the amiability of her new connexions. But many times a day she envied her, as fainting power envies vigorous inferiority.

CHAPTER XIV.

“Brother of Fear, more gaily clad,
The merrier fool of the two, but quite as mad !”

COWLEY, *On Hope*.

“Oimè ! che mia salute
Sarebbe il disperare,
Perchè sol la speranza
E stato mio rovina ; ed anco, ah ! lasso !
Tento di germogliar dentr’ al mio petto.”—TASSO.

THREE weeks after the visit of the John Trouncers’, Helen was keeping house alone with her uncle. Matilda and Esther were making visits in and near London, seeing all they could of the first great Exhibition ; their cousin had been asked to do the same, but refused, shrinking from the associations of her last time in London with morbid horror. Mrs. Trouncer had taken the

three youngest children to the sea-side, for their health's sake after chicken-pox; and her husband, who could not leave home at that time, called himself very lucky to have a resident niece to look after him meanwhile.

"Me dear niece stays behind to console me," she often heard him saying when visitors commented with slight surprise, on finding Miss Raymond left behind. And as she would have liked to be at the sea-side, even in company with the unruly children, and had not been asked to go, it was soothing to her self-love to hear so pleasant a reason assigned for the fact. The change to more complete solitude was agreeable, and the unoccupied rooms an enlargement; it was sultry weather in August, and she enjoyed having both her time and the garden to herself from after breakfast till late dinner, when her uncle rejoined her, and was wont to vent upon her fastidious ear those trite and stale observations which seem good enough for the entertainment

of young ladies to a man who is daily giving six hours a day to dry and uninteresting business. To himself Mr. Trouncer appeared quite lively when he was doing this ; and to Helen his hearty good-nature was now more precious than wit.

The Australian mail had come in, and again brought her no letter ; but with an ingenuity peculiar to hope, she had begun to think it possible that this repeated disappointment was hiding something better than the comfort of a letter. He did not write, and he *must* be full of sorrow and pity for herself and Mercy ; he was, *therefore*, very probably coming home to see what he could do for them. It was like his generous ardent nature to take such a step ; and he might already have got enough at the diggings to provide a competence. He might now be nearing England, longing for greater speed to bring him to her side ; fancying what she was doing and feeling, as now she fancied about him.

The transporting idea came across her one afternoon as she sat under a chestnut tree, watching the dreamy dance of midges in the sunshine that blazed beyond. Henceforth she would never forget the outline of that brawny branch that stretched above her when she looked up, drawing a long breath from intense delight; its thick knotty joints; its dark flapping leaves, with the one or two sickly ones which imperfect penetration of light had left almost colourless;—these, and every sound and scent which at that moment was touching her senses were forever engraved on memory; and she shall never see again the black gloom of chestnut foliage late in summer, without a quick thrill of some obscure emotion.

She reasoned with her new hope, and found it as probable as anything cold reason could urge against it. Were Arthur in her place, orphaned and among aliens, *could* she do anything less than what she now expected of him? It was he who

taunted her, during their last fatal hour alone, with being able to forget him; that he could himself do so, notwithstanding all cruel mistakes and contrarieties, seemed to her quite incredible; so she would rather blame herself for past misgivings than suspect him of slightness any more.

The ecstasy of believing him within a few weeks of return, found no external outlet, unless it was in her more unfeigned cheerfulness when talking to her uncle, and stronger and more joyous notes when she sung to him after tea. But it kept her smiling through happy tears a long time after she went to her own room; standing at her window, and watching the moonlight kiss the tops of the trees, and thinking that it might now be *his* time for moonlight also.

The rapture lasted in fainter degree for several days, but was crossed at intervals by spasms of chilling doubt;—a theory of the heart that wants verification, will not long bear the pressure of every-day life. It breaks down like a dream,

and can never be put together again with quite the same glow of promise. Shadows are sometimes as pretty in outline as the things themselves from which they fall, but they lack colour, and to dwell on them long, invariably causes something of the experience of the Lady of Shallot. "I am half sick of shadows, said the Lady of Shallot."

Helen would have been quite sick of them long before this, but for a naturally sanguine temperament: by nature hopeful, she was more apt to notice the flowers that were budding than those that had already faded. At this time Leopardi's poems were her daily companion. Mrs. Lacey had lent it to her with some other foreign books, and in its depths of melancholy music she found balm for her own sorrow. No mistake is commoner than to suppose that mournful poetry saddens; a happy heart it may, but those who have drained a bitter cup themselves, find sweetness and refreshing cordials in the wine that has been wrung by suffering from the poet's own

heart: for the very fact that this wine is offered to fellow-pilgrims proves his sufferings to be *past*, and that is just what seems most impossible in every time of trouble. Besides, add any sense of the sublime to grief and you lessen it. Even despair may be thus “sublimed to power.”* And when in the long gorgeous days of summer Helen sat alone, without friends or social pleasures, reading the noble Italian’s lines to “Il passero solitario” of which he says,—

Tu pensoso in disparte il tutto miri ;
 Non compagni, non voli,
 Non ti cal d’allegria, schivi gli spassi ;
 Canti, e così trapassi
 Di tua vità e dell’ anno il più bel fiore.
 Oimè, quanto somiglia
 Al tuo costume il mio !

she felt the pathos of the comparison; called herself too a solitary bird, and being thus enabled to place her humbling grief in a beautiful and poetical light, its sting was taken from it, and all

* Mrs. Browning.

that made it bitter, softened. Simple melancholy is itself an exquisite enjoyment; she would not have believed it, had she been told so at that time, but in after years she could see, in looking back, that it was.

The restlessness of eager youth was already gone from her, and she had been so tamed and flattened by the events of the last year, that now merely to sit on the lawn for an hour at a time watching the quiet goings on of the clouds, was a pleasure; only to sit and read in the drawing-room out of ear-shot of her aunt's sharp tongue, out of eye-glance of Esther's moody face, a very real repose. At times, she thought with a curious sort of resentment, that the society which so many would have prized, which so many sought, a year ago, was now the undisputed right of one wholly unable to detect its best qualities. For nothing but the smallest small-talk, and the lightest renderings of thought suited her busy uncle. She knew that all dispositions of Providence were right,

but this seemed strange. She did not know, for she had not lived long enough to observe it, that rich natures are most frequently insulated by being shut up in exclusive communication with those who cannot so far combine with them as to lower one aspiration to the level of earthborn happiness.

Mrs. Trouncer came home very full of applause for Helen's good management: very much disposed to make the most of her, and give her all the attention and happiness she could, while undisturbed by the jealousies of her step-daughters; and so, several weeks passed during which Helen had not much time alone, either to read or to build air castles. But the one she had built was now suddenly levelled. A cover arrived one morning from her aunt Catherine and a note from Arthur was enclosed. Only a single note sheet, addressed to Mercy and beginning, "My dear cousins,"—simply a letter of condolence, which, to Helen, seemed pitiless in formality and constraint.

Not a single sentence applicable to herself alone ; no kind of referring to last summer's hopes ; only a grave announcement of sympathy for their loss, and good wishes for their future. Not a word about himself either, nothing could be colder than it was.

Hardly able to believe what her eyes saw, Helen turned to his mother's letter. That, also, destroyed a lesser hope, but still a dear one. She had long promised herself the pleasure of going to stay a little while with Mrs. Lemayne ; and meant to propose doing so as soon as her cousins came home, and she was no longer in requisition there. But in this letter, she learned that Richard was just going to be married, and that in a week's time her aunt Catherine was going to take up her abode at the Clergymen's Widows' Home near Bristol. However, the tenor of these letters took away Helen's desire to carry out her former design. "Arthur seems fully satisfied with his present occupation," wrote his mother ; "he did

not know where you or your sister might be, and therefore enclosed his letter to me."

Had she allowed Helen to see the one that came with it, much sorrow would have been spared to her, though in another way it would have grieved her too. But nothing is so cruel, nothing causes such anguish in cases like these, as the seeming composure of indifference.

To his mother, Arthur wrote in a tone of suppressed despair; it is true that he spoke of his work at the diggings as successful; but to call him satisfied was a misapplication of terms. He hated his work, and hated his manner of life; but the wealth he gained by the one, was necessary for the ruinous extravagancies of the other; and he took no trouble to conceal the intensity of his own self-contempt.

"You tell me," he said, "to remember how much I have to be thankful for still. I really don't see any peculiar signs of mercy bestowed on me hitherto; if I have not gone quite to the devil,

it's more luck than good care; and the less *I* talk of Providence, the less chance I have of being a hypocrite. You *know*, mother, what a sickener I had of religion this time last year at Fernwick. I hope my poor uncle may be able to give a better account of his conduct than I could—but that's a thing of the *past*, dead and buried, and done for. By-the-way, when is my cousin to be married? I suppose Mr. Ashcroft will have claimed his bride by this time."

Painful as such a letter would have been to read, it would have given Helen a clue to his real state of mind, and an excuse for rectifying his false supposition with regard to herself. As it was, she felt it impossible to write to him after that guarded unsympathizing letter. She had all a woman's pride as well as a woman's love, and if *this* was his state of feeling, he should never again know hers.

Ever since Helen had left her old home, the imagination of Arthur's fond approval had spurred

her on to courageous endurance, and gentle, unrepining submission. Unconsciously, she lived inwardly under the fancied gaze of his admiring love: she was acting, speaking, yes, and looking on a scene where *her image of him* watched her all day.

“ But e'en the meteor offspring of the brain,
Unnourished, wane ;
Faith asks her daily bread,
And Fancy must be fed.” *

And her faith in his affection had been slowly starved out, and now a stone had been given to meet the demands of fancy.

God forgive us! We can prolong patience and practise virtue while we have the imaginary approval of a human idol; but when that fails, His all-seeing eye finds us flagging—reckless, hopeless of any incitement strong enough to fill its place. And yet He is a faithful witness, and would we seek His face of love, we should surely find it. Helen now sought it, as a drowning sailor seeks for a rafter or a rope when wrecked

* Coleridge.

in dark night. After reading those letters, she sought it earnestly, blindly groping towards it. Do not ask what she found, as any proof of what may be given at such times. She found a deep silence in her spirit, and a suddenly renewed conviction that the Lord was stronger than she. She wrung her hands in vehement despair; till the still air about her seemed full of calm attention to her plaints; her bewildered eyes looked up with imploring intentness to a Being whom she felt to be present. She could not pray at that moment, but her face, her attitude, her dismayed thought, poured out their wordless supplication.

CHAPTER XV.

"Love and trust are the only mother's milk for any man's soul. So far as he is hated and mistrusted his powers are destroyed. . . . As the flower is gnawed by frost, so every human heart is gnawed by faithlessness. And as surely—as irrevocably, as the fruit-bud falls before the east wind, so fails the power of the kindest human heart if you meet it with poison."—RUSKIN.

THE first setting in of autumn, draws a family more together: there are longer evenings, and consequently much more scope for the temptation of uneasy taste and touchy tempers. A kind of consternation affects the fastidious mind when first it feels hemmed in by long candlelight evenings to close companionship with uncongenial natures. Then stale fun and brusque manners, and ugly looks, afflict it with a lively dread of

“being all together,”—as people sometimes say in exhilarated tones, as if that alone was happiness. Helen found the autumn months so trying, that she hardly dared to look on to the winter. With the Trouncers in their happiest moods she felt herself in proximity to vulgar minds whose standard was in all things lower than her own; she felt sure, that with all her refinements of politeness and scruples of consideration, she continually annoyed them by her want of interest in their coarser web of interests. They did not say this. No perception of the difference between them transpired verbally, for they were, in a way, as ill at ease with her as she with them. To her nature, it would have been almost less painful had they exploded into open avowal of the contempt, which they only ventured to imply by looks and gestures. Fain would she have merged all sharp contrasts of feeling in hearty good-will; with her uncle and aunt this was generally possible, but not so with the

younger ones. Matilda envied her, and tried to hide such ill-feeling from herself by professing a slighting sort of pity for any one so silly and airified.

Esther not only regarded her with the dull suspicions which any sparkle of talent is wont to arouse in a heavy ungifted mind, but she fancied herself now less attended to at home because of Helen's presence. In order to obtain any real knowledge of truth, we must see things in every possible perspective: now, from Matilda and Esther's point of view, Helen's residence among them was a real trial and provocation. It was undeniable that when they were seen together, people did more readily accost the beautiful gentle girl in mourning, than the over-dressed perking-mannered women who called her cousin. Nor did she, used from childhood to what are called attentions, perceive her superior advantages in society enough to try and avoid them for her cousins' sake. She would have been as likely

to set aside the prerogative of air and light. This—to Matilda and Esther an unimaginable state of things—looked to them like arrogance, taking admiration for granted, assuming honours not due. They judged Helen as if she felt what they would have felt in her position without her antecedents; how *could* they, with theirs, guess what she was feeling on occasions that seemed to them only too flattering and pleasant? Such, for instance, as Mrs. Lacey begging that Miss Raymond might be told that she was in the house, when she called one grim November day.

Esther found her sitting at her window, idle from profound dejection. The lilac bushes were shivering outside in the bleak fog-breaking wind; bushes, which to her eye appeared like vegetable embodiments of childhood's joy,—the companions of many a gleeful holiday; which supplied switches for Richard and Arthur, and sweet, pinky lilac plumes for her and Mercy to deck their hats with; and a covert for would-be hid-ers.

There grew the same plants now in these sad grown-up days, and looked like friends who in trouble, no longer recognize one's more prosperous past.

From childish holidays, memory had travelled on to the summer days of adolescence: to reading French with Mercy and their governess in the summer-house, and being scolded for attending less to her book than to the stately peacock, slowly jerking its brilliant spread of feather eyes behind its little inquisitive head, on the sunny lawn before them. From out that past, stern tones reached her, sounding like ejaculations of love: she forgot all the restraint, and effort, and monotony of that time, and only remembered its assured affection, its peace, and freedom from fear. To her stricken heart its every common incident seemed charged with tenderness—but memory is startled by Esther's voice.

"Mrs. Lacey is here. She thinks you wanted to know what books were going back in her box

to Mudie's this week. You will come down, I dare say."

An ungracious construe of the visitor's wish, and a constructive inference of her words, adopted to weaken the effect of a compliment. Yet for Helen, there was a glint of pleasure in the saying. It betokened remembrance of her individuality. The Trouncers had one mode of depressing her self-complacency, which is at once the easiest and most sure of success,—never noticing her tastes or wishes more than they could in any way avoid. So that, to her, it had begun to seem quite a gratifying attention when people chanced to speak of a view that was worth her going to see, or of a book likely to please her.

But society was no longer a pleasure to Helen: she was gradually losing her self-possession. Any habitual dread of malevolence,—however little we allow to ourselves that this can possibly exist, robs us of self-possession. Inevitably must a person, in her position, find her self-estimate

impaired, her powers enfeebled, her faith in natural advantages shaken.

She began to feel almost shy and awkward when talking to other people in the presence of her cousins. She could not understand why she felt beside them these quick alternations of bashfulness in her own demeanour, and shame and shock from that of her companions; for she had not studied human life long enough to perceive that such natures as are too unrefined to keep their own tempers and distastes in check, naturally dislike a manner which, to them, seems artificial and elaborately smooth.

Sometimes when she was present during one of their many little broils, Helen would try to smooth matters between her aunt and Esther; but, as usual, the interposition of a gentle delicate nature had no success with coarser belligerents; and they would both irritate themselves afresh against *her*, for being, as they said, when she

left the room, so absurdly “miminy-piminy” in her tone of speaking.

From time immemorial, a pacification of combatants has been celebrated by sacrifice, and after their sisterly squabbles, Matilda and Esther, like other women, often sacrificed the character of a third to their united powers of fault-finding. Helen was generally the victim. She did not know it, but she felt unloved; and to a love-craving nature like hers, this—together with the sense of being surrounded, pressed upon by many whom she could not love—was a daily torment. Negatives alone would have sufficed to sadden her very deeply: and those natures which are least able to inflict pain are usually most susceptible of it from the condition and conduct of other people; they suffer a double series of trials, both by sympathy and on their own account. With this make of mind, Helen paid to the full its penalties; her spirited air was the result of high mettle, but from no inward wounds could

it save her; for the more refined nature is more perceptive; it takes all the blows of secret antagonism, and, shrinking from them, loses the courage which is indispensable for making head against unfavourable prejudice. Often and often did she rally her sinking spirits, determined to be brave and cheerful. She applied to herself the hard proverbial saying about beggars; she tried, on principle, to adapt herself to Trouncer ways so far as she could, and praised loudly, and, perhaps, a little too emphatically, anything of which she could honestly say that it pleased her; but, through all her endeavours, she heard the stifled groans of displeasure that Nature uttered within.

Many a time, after appearing lively and interested by what was going on downstairs, would she go to her room at night, and snatch up a book, trying at once to take off the taste of a nauseating and repulsive day: and there was something too hard and too ugly in its sorrows for soft melancholy, pink eyelids and moist eyes.

Her face grew stiffer, and its expression more fixed, as time advanced. She felt at times as if continued contact with coarser minds was altering the tone of hers—as if, in trying to escape from the desolation of feeling which the *sight* of baser modes of thought and action caused her, she had tried to sympathize with baseness, till her own standard was debased—her own moral dignity compromised. Alas for her! How difficult it was to know how much of humiliating influences around her she ought to resist, how much to accept meekly, as the appointed cross of natural pride. Every now and then she had gusts of such extreme wretchedness that she felt as if she could not any longer endure her present circumstances; that she thought she would free herself from them at any risk; but looking round on life, bewildered by dismay, she saw everything so steady in routine, so unexpected of vehement emotion, and so strong in conventional decorum, that she succumbed to the

fate assigned to her, and tried once more to be what she was expected to be—a contented member of a very respectable family.

“But surely,” she thought, “Norman and Mercy will never let me go on thus, when they hear—even Mr. Heathcote, if I told him the half of what I suffer here, would come and take me away. Dear old man! he would not allow me to be made so unhappy!”

Norman and Mercy were, when they answered her last letter, hardly recovered from a dangerous fever at Shanghai: they had had a heavy financial loss, from the wreck of a vessel bringing supplies from England: they were, therefore, in no mood for countenancing change: they exhorted to contentment—making the best of it,—to looking at the bright side of things; and when all appropriate truisms had been affectionately urged, Norman indulged in a jocose postscript, which his wife signed as well as himself, to the effect that they were eager to hear who

their new brother-in-law was likely to be, as they were sure some one must have good taste enough to please pretty Nelly before long.

Before her marriage, Mercy would never have put her hand to such a saying; what is it in married life that so often makes a woman's touch upon heart affairs more coarse and unhesitating? Is it that for her its illusions are gone, and its sober joy more certain? or that the pressure of material cares has broken every bubble of fancy, and so made substantial interests appear more real than sentiment? Whatever the cause, the effect struck Helen as unkind, and she laid aside the letter with angered thoughts.

To Mr. Heathcote she wrote, and described to him some of her most describable annoyances. He answered by return of post — pitying her with the profuse expressiveness of one who is not meaning to do anything besides in the way of help. He was sorry that, under existing circumstances, he could not ask her to stay with

them. Mrs. Heathcote's mother and sister had just come to be society for her, during her seclusion upstairs. And Beatrice Chadleigh had written kindly, eagerly, her phrases of feeling strongly dashed; but they were going to winter in the south of France: Helen must visit them on their return.

There is a point in the lot of unhappy people where the compassion of best friends generally fails. It is when complaints or signs of grief are reiterated long after the time when it is concluded that nothing more can be done for their relief. It is natural that this should make the comforters a little impatient. The trouble which is thus lamented, has become to them an unalterable fact, on which nothing can throw new light; but to the sufferer it is an ever-growing mystery of divine government, — a network of trial that expands, and takes new forms of affliction under the ever-varying aspects of life's every day. Well for us that there is this short-coming in

human sympathy, for if we could content ourselves with its scanty measures, too certainly we should. As it is, appeal to the kindest and most intelligent advisers still leaves so much of sorrow untold, still finds so much of despair unguessed, and pain unpitied, that we turn to the All-knowing as the only Comforter.

Those who have known the deep peace given by His unheard, but certain and divine sympathy, will never care for any other in comparison. Now, Helen was one of the large class of orphan spirits who have neither father, nor mother, nor brother to turn to. The Saviour leaves them so unsheltered among men, that they must flee to Him for consolation and support.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Ich hatte ja kein nestchen, mich zu decken,
Und keine Brust, mich innig dran zu stecken."

DINGLESTEDT,

"L'amour des autres envers nous n'est pas seulement l'objet de notre vanité et la nourriture de notre amour propre, c'est aussi le lit de notre faiblesse. Notre âme est si languissante et si faible, qu'elle ne saurait se soutenir, si elle n'est comme portée par l'approbation et l'amour des hommes."—NICOLE.

WHY describe the tedium of an irksome life? its countless shades of mournful feeling, its slowly accepted convictions as to a lot which, when first fully known, seemed impossible, dreadful;—when long endured, unalterably likely to last? Between the two states of feeling what revulsion! what dismay! what struggles for submission! what a pathetic meek despair!

Helen passed through all these phases of discipline. At times she asked herself whether it was indeed the same creature who had lived at Fernwick, and now pined here. She felt so changed within, grown so mechanical in action, in speech so diffident, in thought so hopeless, in aspiration so humble; half her nature paralyzed, the other half seemingly perverted. Was it possible that she who, till she came here, had never known a malicious thought, should now feel a wretched kind of satisfaction in hearing Matilda snubbed by Mrs. Trouncer, in seeing her artificial pleasantness recognized in society for what it was, and passed by? Had she fallen so low as to like to prove to Esther that her arrogant stupidity had allowed her to perpetrate a gross blunder? She had. One of the saddest, and probably one of the most useful mortifications brought about by living with meaner natures is this—that they draw out the latent meanness of those who had believed themselves safe from its infection—

that with spite, and unkindness, and suspicions, they sully and exasperate the noblest mind, and, if possible, drag it down to a level where their own petty feelings may sting corresponding emotions into life. Thus are the lofty brought low.

This was the most bitter drop of Helen's nauseating cup. When aware of any rising temper, any vindictive mood, she strove as much as she could to avoid temptation, and would often in coldest days hurry out of the house, and try to lose remembrance of her own provocation beside the bed of the suffering, or the bleak fireside of the needy. Ever since Mrs. Trouncer and the elder daughters had been convinced that Helen's interest in the poor was genuine, and not a prospective adaptation of her taste to Edwin's, they offered no opposition to it. It was to her a matter of rejoicing that the rector of their parish was old, and the curate married. Many a quieting hour had she passed visiting, and working for cottage friends during the slow creeping months of winter.

This, and Arabella's accomplishments in French and music, formed the only pursuit in which she could now make progress. The little girl had become really attached to her, and there was some solace even in her childish capricious love.

Unfortunately for Helen, when Lent came and the services of the Church were more frequent, Mr. Beechey, the curate, found his strength unequal to the duties of his office, and was succeeded by a young and unmarried deacon; and what was worse, he was both rich and very shy. This latter qualification for being "encouraged" by the Trouncers, rendered him liable to an irresistible battery of attentions—irresistible to an awkward man, little used to society; he could not rid himself of friendly importunities without so much colouring and stammering confusion that he found it easier to walk in; easier to come to dinner, and drop in to tea, though, poor fellow! until he had passed several evenings in Helen's presence, it was more a case of being dragged in than being inclined to stop.

Natural results followed. Mrs. Trouncer settled it in her own mind that Mr. Tideman and Matilda would be well matched; her confidence was just what he wanted to help his modesty; and really he was a very promising amiable young man. Matilda thought so too, and if Helen had been able to see all that passed in her mind when the new hero, after talking a little to her cousin, managed, with clumsy determination, to pass on to a chair near herself, she would assuredly have pitied Matilda as tenderly, and with as kind allowance for her feelings, as she did the peevish old woman for whom she was making a cap. Such insight is not often given. Helen only saw the stealthy watchful glance, and the little toss of the chin: she heartily wished Mr. Tideman or any one else would transplant Matilda, but the wish had not much kindness in it. Perhaps some almost invisible slights would be adroitly administered by the disappointed woman a few minutes afterwards; the first opportunity for a humiliating

stroke of the tongue sharply snatched under smiles: if it heightened the colour on Helen's cheek, or gave a brighter flash to her eyes, was it not natural that it caused her to talk more gaily, and laugh more frequently, in order to cover the intolerable wounds of pride? Was it not natural for such appearances to be taken for the glow of triumphant vanity by ill-natured lookers-on? Was it not natural that wit and beauty together should perfectly charm the young curate? Alas! how natural it was that the next day the domestic atmosphere should be charged with stormy elements!

Matilda Trouncer had read with horror of the women-poisoners of old time: it never occurred to her that every day of her life she was now infusing poison into Helen's whole being; that she dropped it in at every meal, and filled the air about her with malignant influence. This was what she was doing. Because the poison was subtle and nameless, it was none the less potent for harming.

Helen's strength had perceptibly diminished, and she was getting so thin and pale that Mr. Trouncer noticed it with kind concern, and his wife often asked her, at the top of her voice, if anything was the matter. When May came, she insisted on the doctor's being consulted; "want of tone in the system—nervous debility" said the doctor, and Helen's heart sank. She had flattered herself that it was something worse, she had believed herself to be approaching that time when "nothing brings me all things."*

One Sunday, she and Matilda were the last to leave the house for church; they were going out through the drawing-room window, Helen fastening her glove as she stood beside it.

"Make haste, can't you?" ejaculated her cousin with shrill emphasis, "Mr. Tideman won't wait all day even for you."

The angry tone in which these words were uttered made Helen start: she hurried forward,

* Shakspeare.

and her dress catching in a blind hook, she fell, and struck her knee violently against the stone step below. The pain was so intense that for a few seconds she was speechless, and her white face and closed eyes frightened Matilda, and smote her with remorse. Her impatience had brought about the accident, and she felt very sorry, and made many eager apologies as soon as Helen was sufficiently recovered to hear what was said. Ah! how many a blow had she given to that cousin's heart without excuse of accident, or any compunctious feeling! Did she think the heart less sensitive of pain than the body's skin and muscles? But now all that was womanly and tender in a crafty nature roused for Helen's relief. The knee was seriously injured, and inflammation followed, and then a kind of low fever; keeping her some weeks in her room, in a languid drowse of almost painless weakness; and yet, as the doctor said, needing constant care.

Mrs. Trouncer gave herself up to nursing with

bustling solicitude, but made so much stir in the sick room, that Helen was fain to ask to be left quite alone. She felt the true kindness intended, but was glad to be rid of its expression when every sight and sound wearied. Matilda and Esther, and Arabella now all found scope for their better feelings towards the poor invalid, and Esther, more especially, shone. Beneath her cross-grained dulness, lay a rich vein of kind feeling; in general it was hidden even from herself by unpleasant tempers, and finding herself ineffective in common society, she was ignorant of her own peculiar resources. In the sick room they began to appear; there she seemed more thoughtful than slow, more gentle than dull, and even her face looked brighter. It is enough to brighten and beautify any face to find out that a long disliked self can be of comfort, and give the help that few others can.

In so far as she was capable of any emotion, Helen was surprised. She actually liked to see:

Esther sitting beside her, and during those days of helplessness, Esther discovered in her charms to which she had been blind hitherto. Such invariable patience and gentleness won upon her, and she could never again suspect Helen of being artful or unkind, whatever Matilda might say.

As her invalid cousin regained strength, she withdrew from attendance; a sour diffidence like hers returns after temporary abeyance, like the sands that encroach on the waters of the Nile, but she never returned to her old disparaging estimates of Helen; she would contradict her, and scowl at her as before, but in heart she respected her, and cherished a sort of fondness for the character she could not but admire.

Helen recovered. She got well; but the return to the old routine of a joyless life seemed almost like another sickness. No fond eye danced to see her downstairs again; no heart-warm welcome greeted her; there was a kind word in every mouth, but such a constrained tone in saying it

(for now Mr. Tideman's attentions would be again divided,) that Helen felt as if she had been happier alone with Esther in her own room than now, exposed afresh to the inequalities of a Trouncer circle.

It was summer—the beginning of a very wet July. Heavy downpour of rain, through a breathless sultry air, from early morning till dark. Such a weight of water fell, that the birds—except a few sparrows—were silenced. The whole green world seemed rapt in deep absorption of what the heavens sent down, and thick foliage combined with thick unbroken clouds to darken summer's light. Meanwhile every green thing got greener; and what had been a tight folded sheath of blossom early in the day, softly burst before sunset, and let out the bright colours of its glowing petals. Nature, in her stillness, had been transacting much work, and filling with plenteousness every living growth. Helen's musing eye noted this, and she often knelt when she could not word

a prayer. Her heart implored a like blessing for the dark still day of her present life. If ever God granted her its sunshine again, might she not find that whilst gloom prevailed, His grace had been perfecting and unfolding the beauty and crown of her spirit?

CHAPTER XVII.

"Tanta paura e duol l'alma trista ange ;
Che 'l desir vive, e la speranza è morta:
Onde si sbigottisce, e si sconsorta
Mia vita in tutto, e notte e giorno piange;
Stanca senza governo in mar, che frange,
E'n dubbia via senza fidata scorta."—PETRARCA.

AFTER many fruitless efforts to establish a lasting good understanding with Matilda, Helen resigned herself to keeping a safe distance between them,—the only possible distance for a Christian,—of punctilious courtesy. She avoided all explanations with her, having, by frequent experience, proved that these only make disagreement more painful and profound, as ice, several times half melted, freezes harder each time it is again congealed.

Matilda, too, had learned to feel a little whole-

some fear of her cousin's wit, and when her ill-humours were at their height, she generally vented them more freely upon Esther than any one else. In this way, she carried on a good deal of bedroom worrying; for it was, for the most part, reserved for privacy. One day, however—and as it chanced, a day when Mr. Tideman and several other neighbours were dining with them—Esther had incurred her sister's displeasure by some *gaucherie* that very much annoyed her at dinner-time; and as soon as the ladies were in the drawing-room, implied rebukes began, and she carried on a sharp *sotto voce* teasing between smiles,—the smiles for the nearest guests, the teasing for Esther. All the mild blandishments of a vain woman doing the agreeable for the one, all the threats of ill-temper for the other. At length, both grew too angry to attend to any one but each other, and, for good manners' sake, Helen was longing to interpose, when the entrance of the gentlemen gave an entire change to Matilda's

whole bearing. There was a honeyed tone, a modest hesitation of accent when offering her opinions to them, which strangely contrasted with the tartness and roughness of her words a few minutes before. Helen had not yet made Ariosto's generalization—

"Facean gran contese

Come uso femminil spesso esser suole ;

Ma come il Conte ne la grotta scese

Feniron le dispute, e le parole ;"

but she did notice that Mr. Tideman was standing near, and with a sudden wish that such a simple-hearted man should not be taken in by her wiles, she challenged him to play a game of chess. He was delighted ; and she, soon absorbed in her game, thought no more of any one who might be wishing to play with him a more difficult game of skill.

The battle won, she had had quite enough of his simpering proximity, but he continued to converse and look pleased beside her, till almost every other guest had taken leave. It never crossed her

imagination that this could be accounted a grave offence; she thought him wanting in tact, and the evening tedious. Her companions looked as tired as herself, when she said good-night, and no wonder. They looked much more than that, but not having the clue to their feelings, these were unguessed.

The following day, after an oppressively silent breakfast, Mrs. Trouncer went into the drawing-room with Helen, and when she was alone with her, after dismissing Arabella and Penelope, began to clear her throat, and fidget about the room, as if at a loss how to broach an unpleasant subject.

"It feels very sultry this morning!" observed Helen, wishing to relieve her aunt's embarrassment.

"I have not had my thoughts sufficiently disengaged to notice the weather;—Helen, I *trust* you do not mean to go on trifling with Mr. Tideman's affections, which are evidently, as you must be aware——"

"Mr. Tideman's affections! I really know nothing at all about them; except that he always seems kindly disposed."

"I am ashamed of you, Helen; you cannot forget last evening."

"No, truly; he nearly wore me out by staying so late. It is not my fault, aunt, indeed, if a man has not tact enough to see when his attentions are undesired."

"All flirts say the same," replied her aunt, coldly.

"I, a flirt?"

"Yes. There are many ways of flirting."

"I will not remain here, aunt, any longer. I *won't* live with people who think so ill of me. I can no longer endure your unkind taunts and cruel insinuations; if you wish Mr. Tideman to marry Matilda, you shall not think that I stand in her way."

"Nonsense, Helen; I cannot have such absurd things said to me by a relation. You really

should not trust yourself to speak while you are so excited; listen to reason, my dear; all these fine sayings about what you will and won't do, are hardly suitable in your case——”

“They *are* suitable, for they are true, and I will make them good.”

Her lips were white with passion, and her voice shook so much, that it was well for her pride that Mrs. Trouncer cut short the sentence.

“And *how*, I should like to know? It is easy to say you cannot bear this, or that; the question is, what alternative have you? I must say, such angry words were hardly to be looked for from one in *your* position; not very becoming in *your* mouth, my dear, which you may remember was once full of thankfulness for the home offered.”

She could not have laid in the lash more closely, and the soothing voice with which these words were spoken gave them an intensity of provocation. Their hard truth was painful enough, the tone in which it was uttered seemed positively insulting,

and for three minutes she lost her self-command entirely, and replied in an ecstasy of anger. All the irritation and resentment, and carefully suppressed dislike of the last thirteen months, now burst out with an uncontrolled vehemence — so much the greater from the long force put upon them. People can live side by side, hiding even from themselves how little they care for each other, how much they find repugnant; but if Nature once gains an opportunity of free expression, with what violence will it find vent!

Helen's nature was gentle and calm, but goaded and stung to desperate indignation, she seemed another being, and for the moment made her aunt's courage quail under the flash of her scornful eye. She absolutely silenced her; and after once more emphatically repeating, "I shall leave you, and as soon as I possibly can," she turned from her, and left the room, regardless of the expostulatory ejaculations which were going on when she reached the door.

What a strange silence received her upstairs! The profound quiet of a well-ordered bedroom seemed to stare at her agitation with surprise. She tried to re-collect the scattered forces of her spirit, —to re-consider what had escaped her during its storm of wrath, to survey her new prospects with calm resolution; but for some time she could only keep on saying to herself, "I don't care. I'm glad I spoke! I *must* go away, now."

Gradually passion subsided, and as its heat lessened, the forlorn destitution of her out-look began to make itself felt. She had cut herself adrift from the only moorings she had in life's hazardous main, and what was now to become of her? Even if she could again endure dependence, in whose house would she accept it? She resolved to make a wiser experiment, to try and earn. Music and French, and Italian, she was undoubtedly able to teach, if she could but once overcome the insuperable objections of pride and timidity. The very idea of being a governess was

abhorrent to her; it seemed worse than death, worse than anything *except* a longer residence here. So she steadied her nerves with resolution, and began a letter to one Mrs. Fraser, in which she declared herself eager to get an engagement as daily governess, if they could recommend her to some place in London where she might board and live at a very low rate of payment. She passed as lightly as she could over the circumstances that had led her to wish for such employment, and ended by imploring a speedy reply.

"Would you mind," she added, with a pen long suspended in doubt, "would you mind my coming to you at once, to stay just till you can direct me to lodgings? I would not propose this, but that you have so often kindly pressed me to come, when I was not able."

On paper, her scheme showed a kind of dreary plausibility; its elaboration had at least given her time for self-recovery, and a supporting sense of having something to fall back upon. The belief

that she was deeply injured by her aunt's accusations, had a fortifying effect upon her spirits throughout that miserable day; it made her deportment fearless and firm, but from such a source as this, no real comfort can be derived. It seemed to distance her from the inward sanctuary. In the uproar and angry revolt of her feelings, she could not turn to religious consolation. But they came back to their old channels the next morning, like a flood, when that day's post brought her a letter from Beatrice Chadleigh, urging her to make her long-promised visit to Grailedge without delay; to come and stay some time; for months, if she could. It was really a very kind letter for one of hers; and, coming when it did, seemed affectionate.

How thankful Helen felt that hers to Mrs. Fraser was not yet posted,—that she had kept it back one day for the benefit of full deliberation. It was now burned, and with a glow of pleasure she wrote to name an early day for arrival at her

friend's house; not entering into particulars, but saying that very painful circumstances made the invitation extremely welcome. Was it her fancy—suspicious from felt disadvantage—or was it fact, that Mrs. Chadleigh's reply, telling her the best train to come by, was some degrees less hearty? Helen looked twice at the signature: it had been "very affectionate" before; this time it was "affectionate" only; but then she added, "in great haste."

"Oh," thought Helen, with a sigh, "it will never do for *me* to be touchy and exacting."

That same day, she began to feel some contrition towards her aunt, whose explicit crying at dinner-time, and reprobatory tone of voice whenever she addressed her, failed to excite any. Her heart was now softened by hope, and she could not forgive herself till she had owned her fault, and asked pardon for angry words.

"I spoke very improperly to you, yesterday morning," she said to her aunt, regardless of

Matilda's malicious glance, and Esther's gaze of dull surprise. "I beg your pardon for saying what I did—as I said it—but you pained me inexpressibly, and I lost all command of my temper."

"I'm sure, my love, that it was but temper. I couldn't believe that you meant anything half so unkind in cool blood; you couldn't misunderstand your poor aunt so cruelly. Come, let us kiss and be friends, and forget all about it; all that you said about leaving us was sheer nonsense, you know."

Loud kisses, and a hugging embrace, overtook Helen before she could find words of reply. She had made an immense effort in seeking reconciliation, for truth's sake; and now truth required that she should not allow the impressions of yesterday to be considered merely the result of temper.

"I spoke too angrily," she said, reddening and hesitating in her speech; "but—it will vex you to

hear it, but, aunt, I must, in grave earnest, say that I no longer wish to live here. You have been very kind to have me so long, but it will be far happier for me to be independent and try to earn; and henceforth this is what I seriously intend doing."

"You earn! and pray how do you expect to do that?"

"By teaching."

"*You* teach! Really, Helen, you must be beside yourself to dream of such a thing: what possible excuse have you for disgracing your family in that way? Fancy Mrs. Lacey's surprise at such a notion, when she *knows* this to be your natural home now. You say you don't care a rush for *her*, and laugh; but Mercy won't laugh, I can tell you, when she hears of it, and as for your poor dear father, it's enough to make him turn in his grave to hear you talk so. Now, pray don't let me hear a word more of such folly; I will not listen to it; it's very hard when I have been all

this year past doing my best to make you comfortable, — new chintz covers, and white muslin curtains, and everything in your room as good as I could get it, because I knew you are so particular——”

Mrs. Trouncer had run on till she was out of breath, so Helen had at last time to say,—

“Oh, it is not that; it is not my external circumstances that I object to, dear aunt.”

“That’s just what I say,” continued Mrs. Trouncer, “it is only the haughty spirit that won’t accept its appointed lot that makes you dissatisfied. You cannot bear not to be first in everything, as you were in your father’s house.”

“Quarrelling with your bread-and-butter, I should say!” interjected Matilda.

“Take my advice, Helen, when you have known the world as long as I have, you will not be in such a hurry to leave good quarters for some whimsy like this. You will think better of it, my dear, I am convinced, after a time; and I should

hope would have too much good feeling, I *might* say gratitude, to distress us all by taking the rash step you propose. You will see the brighter side of things in a day or two, I'm persuaded: this rainy weather depresses you; and then there's Edwin coming home next week; he will enliven us all, and you know you always found him pleasant company."

"I shall not be here next week, aunt; that was one of the things I came in to tell you;—that I have had a very kind invitation from my friend Mrs. Chadleigh to go as soon as I can; and have written to say that I will come on Saturday."

"Very good, my dear, I have no objection to *that*; though I must say I think you might have consulted me before you gave so definite an answer. If Mrs. Chadleigh has any influence with you, I feel confident that *she* will discountenance your preposterous scheme of governing, and when you return, we shall find you in a wiser frame of mind."

"I will say no more about it now," said Helen, "since it vexes you; it is no enchanting prospect that I am holding out to myself, you may be sure, only—I won't stay in longer, aunt, thank you," she added, obliged to cut short a sentence that would have provoked a fresh torrent of words, and, retreating from the chair beside Mrs. Trouncer, to which she was being beckoned: "I have had no air for two days, and am thirsty for it: there will be time for a walk before tea, it is only half-past seven now. Thank you for trying to make me happy here; I'm sorry I grieved you."

And with a humble, heavy heart she went out of doors. "Quarrelling with my bread-and-butter! truly I get plenty of that sort of kindness; but if the heart wants love, and the taste anything that imagination does not loathe, what have I here? Aunt often talks of the sacrifices she makes for me; I'm sure I don't quite know what; she means kindly, I believe, for the most

part; but she manages to *say* the most unkind things possible."

It was true; now and then in the course of a week Mrs. Trouncer would make herself overwhelmingly agreeable, and would say and do all sorts of things that no one wished for, in the way of kindnesses; and Helen used to think how much rather, if she could have chosen, she would have had a little less of obligation spread over every day, in common forms of courtesy and good humour. But she would not think of her or any of the Trouncers now: she had come out to be alone with Nature.

Walking in the hay-sweetened air of a damp breathless evening, she found Nature full of gladness. The birds were piping on the upper branches of the trees, rejoicing as it seemed in the abatement of heavy rains: the glossy briony had twisted round and round many a higher twig in the maple bushes, and the honeysuckles had opened millions of sweet tubes in broad mats

of blossom on the top of the hedge since Helen had last walked beside it. But now she looked timidly at the luxuriance of beauty around her: after the dire confusion and fierce sorrows of the previous day, she felt as if henceforth she could have no share in calm happiness; as if there was not peace enough in her life now to put her in sympathetic relation with Nature. The perception she now had of its bliss was almost as divided a sense as that of a deadly wounded man, who sees flowers beside him when he lies stretched on the battle-field, and hears birds singing in the air so lately rent by groans. Does such a comparison sound over strong? You who think so may never have seen your whole life's horizon black with dreaded possibilities—have never felt, as she did, that she was totally unnecessary in every home she knew—an adjunct to be borne with, and not a presence to be welcomed and detained as long as it possibly could be. But when she came in she sat down beside her aunt as calmly as

ever, and went on making a summer cloak for Penelope's doll, with as much nicety and care as if that was the only thing occupying her mind.

It is a mistake to talk of court life or fashionable life only being fettered by ceaseless restraint. In the most retired families there are seasons of *gêne* and simulated serenity which no gayer circle could make more onerous; when every smile has its sadly necessary aim, and every word its secret ulterior purpose. In spite of Mrs. Trouncer's professed amnesty, she could not forget Helen's words of burning indignation and contempt, and Helen felt them to be unforgotten beneath the cloak of careful politeness,—felt that her cousins had heard them all with a commentary, if not with a paraphrase—and, worst of all, that her uncle (whom, with all his defects of fine breeding, she affectionately esteemed), that even he had now been led to condemn and dislike her. When she said good-night to him that evening, he

neither met her eye, nor smiled, nor shook hands with his accustomed cordiality.

"I am very sorry," he said, "to hear what has passed between you and your aunt; I had thought differently of you, my dear. People in your position can't have *everything* they like; we've given you the best we had to offer, and if you don't accept it in a right spirit and take things as they are meant, I can't see that you have any cause to complain of *us* anyhow. I wish you good-night; and if I may offer *my* humble opinion, I would say as a practical man who knows *something* of life, don't you be in any hurry to make new plans. There is such a thing as falling out of the frying-pan into the fire."

"Thank you, uncle; I will remember that. Good-night."

She would not attempt self-justification; to him she could not have adduced any valid reasons for being unhappy, for these all hung upon unnameable facts, quite beyond reach of his penetration; but

it was with a singularly painful surprise that she heard him so speak. The sentiments he inferred were not, she knew, his own, but his wife's and daughters'; such opinions never originated in his indulgent nature, yet they proved how completely it had been warped by harsher minds. The sternness thus transmitted through him gave her a new despair; if *he* was un pitying and hard, who was there among them who would make allowance?

CHAPTER XVIII.

"The grave Sir Gilbert holds it for a rule,
That every man in want is knave or fool."

POPE.

"Yet such is conscience, so designed to keep
Stern central watch, though fancied fast asleep;
And so much knowledge of oneself there lies
Cored, after all, in our complacencies,
That no suspicion touched his temper more
Than that of wanting on the generous score."

LEIGH HUNT.

UNTIL she had left them, Helen did not know how intolerably she disliked living with the Trouncers; and then nature spoke out. In retrospect her sufferings during the past year seemed even worse than they were in daily endurance. She now understood the full force of Bishop Hall's wise saying, that as charity requires us to

forgive injuries, so for patience is it necessary that we should forget them also. She tried to forget past chagrins, but the wounds of the tongue had gone deep, and memory was resentful still. Had there been a more respectable cause for her trials, she had suffered far less; it was the ignoble pinch of spitefulness and envy that had sickened her soul, and thrown doubt and annoyance into every trifling incident of life. It seemed to her a disgrace to have been in contact with such base feelings. When speaking to her friend she could hardly refer to that source of grief, for shame and indignation that any one she had to do with should be capable of such degrading faults. Helen knew so little of the world that she would not have expected Mrs. Chadleigh to credit her reports, if she had told her one-half of all she had borne. And apart from this, gratitude for material and intended benefits would have sealed her mouth. She merely said that she was very unhappy at her aunt's and most thankful to escape, that if not

being contented there was her fault, she really did not know how to amend it; the whole family were unlike anything she had ever been used to, and made her feel quite out of her element.

“Country-town manners, my dear; what can you expect better in such a circle? Never mind, you will make a long stay here; and then—why, you are not married to the Trouncers; you will probably have a house of your own before this time next year. How tragical you look! as if that was the very worst thing that could befall you. Now, you see Charlie has set you a good example, and left off wearing the willow long ago; I told you of his engagement to Miss Courteney: rather older than he, but an *excellent* match; and not bad-looking either.”

“Yes, I was truly glad to hear of it.”

“Well, and *you* will give us all the same gladness before long, I hope. I should look upon this time at the Trouncers as a mere inter-

lude. I suppose you see nothing very inviting *there*; young lawyers, and married men in business, eh?"

"I wish, dear Beatrice, that you would not talk in that way to me. What can it matter now whom I see? Pray, do not go on upon that subject, it only annoys me."

Her friend smiled incredulously, and immediately changed the topic of conversation; but confirmed her resolves that Helen should be engaged before she left Grailedge. As soon as a woman feels kindly to another, she begins instinctively to devise how to find her a good husband; a testimony to the wisdom of nature often unconsciously given even by those who withstand it in their own case. Beatrice could neither imagine any scheme of happiness that did not include a good establishment, nor believe that any one else could. Marriage had brought her all she desired except a family—position, wealth, and an amiable associate. From all

exactions of sentiment she was totally free; and if her husband showed any signs of it, they were soon repressed by his handsome stylish wife begging him not to be so ridiculous.

What is the attribute we refer to when we speak of style? Is it not only a delicate modulation of indifference, consequent on safe possession of many tangible advantages, and entire privation of some disturbing and intangible ones—such as enthusiasm, originality, and ardent wishes?

Beatrice had a great deal of ornamental sentiment at her disposal, but she thought it very awkward and stupid of her husband or any one else to expect to find it far below the surface. She had largeness of heart enough to secure the interests, and sympathize with the feelings, of a canary bird, but for a deeper range of requirements she had no heart measure. She was, in her way, very good-natured, but excessively disliked what she called extravagant or high-flown professions;

and many an honest application of high principles to every-day practice she brought under this term. She condemned it, because she would have been forced to condemn herself if she ever fairly confronted the consequences of her own professions, with the facts of her faulty practice. She guessed them enough to fear that lookers-on would, and thus defended her weakest side.

When Mr. Chadleigh first discovered it, there must have been a sudden chill to his warmer heart, but now they got on very well with each other; he, having come to a thoroughly good understanding with the selfishness of his wife, was able to hide what he knew of it, and what he sacrificed to appease it.

Helen had much still to learn of her friend's character; meantime its smooth polish was a delightful rest. The repose of good taste pervaded both her manners and her household. Anything like grandeur and display was, at the Grange, studiously avoided. It was an old-fashioned house

with low-pitched rooms; so that in asking her friends to it, Beatrice could speak with good effect of their quiet old house: but all the luxurious accommodations of modern life within appeared so much the handsomer and more complete, from the unexpected contrast they formed to the rambling and picturesque structure as seen from without. No new invention of elegance or comfort was long out before Mr. and Mrs. Chadleigh had adopted it. It was their ambition to make their home perfect; and a guest who did not find it so must have had cravings for some luxury that money could not secure.

Helen had not been at the Grange three days before she inquired the way to the Lorimers' house.

"Why," replied her friend, "you surely do not want to call there already? I should have thought you had had enough of Trouncer relations for a while, and would be glad of a little rest from them."

"Yes, indeed; but Mrs. Lorimer is a great improvement upon her sisters. Besides, I promised to see her if I ever came to stay with you."

"Oh, I remember, you told me that you had seen them at her father's. They are not people I know much about."

"But Mr. Lorimer is your husband's cousin, is he not?"

"He is, but not at all in Percy's way."

There was a pause, during which Beatrice twitched the filocèle she was working with, rather faster than was usual to such a good worker as herself: and Helen's book was laid down, her eyes turned musingly towards the window, and her thoughts puzzled to find discreet expression.

"I was eager to pay Mrs. Lorimer any attention I could," she said at last, "because they are so very poor—and from what she told me, I felt uncertain whether she would like to call on me here, uninvited; so, as a kind of connexion, I thought I would make the first move."

Her friend let her words pass without reply; and if she frowned as she heard them, she had a mistake in the pattern of her work to account for both silence and knitted brows. And Helen went on.

“*You* cannot imagine, dear Beatrice, how very, very poor they are—what continual anxiety they have in feeding and clothing all those children.”

“Now, that is just what I complain of in Mrs. Lorimer—the obtrusive way in which she announces her poverty. Little as I have seen of her, she thinks it necessary to tell me how long the butcher’s bills are, and how ill they can afford to send Teddy to school. It is such shocking taste to talk of that sort of thing: just like beggars, who insist on showing one all their wounds and burns. Really, Helen, if you mean to be kind to her, you should never encourage her in those pitiful confessions. They do no good. Do explain to her, some day, if ever you have an opportunity, that such confidences are most undesirable. *Quiet* endurance one feels some interest in——”

"But how can rich people divine what is endured, if their poorer friends never let their sufferings transpire? And then people are so cruelly misjudged, if they pass in society for being richer than they are."

"More than half the world does, my dear. I can assure you of that. If we all went about making a parade of our neediness as some people do, you would think society was on the verge of bankruptcy. You remember the Italian proverb—

Di danari, di senno, e di fede,
C'è ne manco che non credi."

"Oh, Beatrice, I am poor myself, very poor; and cannot see things from your point of view, as I once could. You know well, that what you call the neediness of some families, would be affluence of wealth to others. What are the needs of many in our class? Money enough to take a box at the opera for the season: to have a yacht; to travel for months on the continent; and the needs I am

thinking of, are barest necessities: means of sustaining life, and hiding the innocent disgrace of destitution. Oh! Beatrice, don't laugh; it's too sad a subject for laughing."

"I am laughing at your enthusiastic manner, dear, not at what you say. Of course, it's very sad to think of such misery, but as Percy says, I believe it is very seldom innocently incurred. Depend upon it, there's fault or folly somewhere when people are so ill off. Sloth or imprudence, be sure of it. Clergymen are notoriously imprudent and extravagant."

"They need not be either to account for great poverty. What would you do if long illness came into a large family with only two hundred or three hundred a year to live on?"

"I should not have presumed to marry upon such an insufficient income to begin with."

"But if you *had*, or had suffered loss of fortune since—and no one can guard against that, however cautious," said Helen, colouring deeply, for

some flitting expression in Mrs. Chadleigh's face showed a remembrance of her poor father's misdoings, "no one can be safe from sudden calamity, what *would* you do then?"

"Really, dear Helen, that is a question I am not prepared to answer. I hope I should lessen my expectations, and contrive to live within my income somehow; you know all things go by comparison; cottagers live on much less, content and happy. Why should we pursue such a painful subject? I will make a point of having the Lorimers up here to dinner very soon, since your heart is set upon seeing them. Mr. Lorimer is quite a gentleman."

"Poor Mrs. Lorimer! I don't suppose she will accept the invitation for want of a dinner dress."

"Oh, I should not think of asking her to meet any one, of our set, at least. Let us come to luncheon now."

Helen felt piqued and annoyed, but virtually silenced. There was such steely resolve behind

her friend's graceful evasions. Convinced that Beatrice had little or no feeling for the poor clergyman and his wife, she never guessed that in fact she had shown herself charitable towards them. A considerable sum had, at Mr. Chadleigh's suggestion, been put into the plate at the Easter-day offertory, "for the officiating minister" being written on the paper that enclosed it. But this done, she would fain have forgotten its object. She regarded the whole family with a coldly attentive eye; in the bottom of her heart she wished that there never had been such a family: there they were, every year developing more and more of ugliness, shabbiness, and manifest need. The grim phantom of penury beset their home, dulled their spirits, made ugly and incongruous their looks, called with tacit eloquence for all the help she and others could give, and when all was given that affluence could spare, looked on wistfully at easier circumstances, and proved at every turn *how* hard their own continued.

There was no end to the kindness which Henry Lorimer might be expecting at her husband's hands, merely because he was a cousin. She supposed that she was expected to ask them oftener to her house, but with her elegant tastes she could not endure to trouble and dim her imagination with the sordid details of turned clothes, scanty meals, and embarrassed poverty-stricken manners which Mrs. Lorimer's anxious face always managed to bring before her. She would rather give another ten pounds than further attention to importunate facts like these.

To tell the rich of the mean vexations, the worm-wood drops that corrode a poor life, is generally a mistake if you wish either to interest or to please. You think they would, at least, feel some curiosity about unguessed trials: not at all, they are quite pre-occupied with their own. You think it would touch them with tender pity: not of necessity; their momentary compassion is often, and naturally, merged in a general sense of annoyance; for it

worries them only to hear of such an uncomfortable state of things. They either feel themselves expected to try and improve it, or think their own dissatisfied luxury rebuked by cheerful patience. In every way a poor gentleman, or a poor lady, produces nothing but *ennui* and distress in average human nature.

CHAPTER XIX.

“Combien les gens riches et heureux ignorent de choses ! Ils ne savent ni ne pressentent ces combats entre la nécessité et les sentiments les plus doux au cœur ; ces brisements de l’âme qu’il faut cacher comme un crime ; ces délicatesses que l’on ne vous pardonne plus parce qu’elles sont l’appanage de la richesse. Oh ! ces nuances de douleurs ! que chaque jour rend plus sombres, auxquelles un mot ajoute un ombre ; ces nuances qui parcourent toutes les gradations depuis la teinte la plus légère jusqu’au noir le plus noir, qui les connaît bien ? Qui pourra les décrire ? ”—M^{DE}. A. DES ECHEROLLES.

SUCH a conversation as Helen had with her friend about the Lorimers, was only a sample of the mode in which their two natures differed. The difference troubled Helen, but Beatrice called *her* notions eccentric, and, as such, passed them by with a smile ; now and then gently cautioning her against the fatal error of supposing eccentricity a charm in woman. Beatrice had a

systematized egotism which, in its regular serene working, appeared almost virtuous; and her good looks had an unvarying compactness and assurance which pleased one day as much as another. So far as she went, she was unusually finished, and, in this, strikingly unlike Helen, into whose character a touch of genius brought waywardness and many a quick alternation of impulse: now grave to pensiveness; now merry almost to an excited pitch; every now and then irresistibly charming and graceful—all the sweetness of a gentle heart, all the brilliancy of a subtle mind flashing out to soften or kindle every mobile feature; and anon the fascinating light would suddenly fade, and the lovely face wear only the impress of exhaustion and perplexity. This subsidence of all natural vivacity was more frequent when she was in company with Beatrice. Her self-possession was so unalterable that Helen, habitually serene in manner, often became embarrassed when talking to her. A problem this,

but a fact: extreme calm in another person often agitates a highly nervous temperament. She tried to stir that calm with generous self-devoting ideas. She failed, and felt the sort of impatience of narrow-minded views which one feels on a fresh sweet-aired day, when walking outside a house with closed windows. But it may be possible to go in and open these; it is seldom possible to overcome prejudice, and never to enlarge a cramped and egotistical nature; for an entire alteration of mental structure is wanted for that purpose.

Nevertheless, Helen's wishes had their weight with Beatrice, and, as such, she would indulge them. The very next day after their discussion about the Lorimers, Helen heard voices in the garden, as she sat reading in an alcove outside the drawing-room window, and, looking up, saw Beatrice coming down the garden walk with Mrs. Lorimer and Laura. They were still at some distance from her, and she had time to

notice the contrast of appearance in the two ladies as they moved side by side: the rich woman with natural elasticity and grace, the inimitable grace of confidence; while the step of the other was uneven, almost shambling, an attempt to keep the same pace with a body whose nervous system was so piteously different from her own that the attempt necessarily failed.

In her eagerness to gratify Helen, Beatrice had gone off to Mrs. Lorimer's soon after luncheon, and insisted on bringing her home to dinner, regardless of all apologies for the scarcely presentable print dress, which many little ones climbing up and down had tumbled.

"Oh, pray do not think about that, Mrs. Lorimer; we are quite alone to-day, and I want to give Miss Raymond a surprise. You will leave word that you are gone, and wish Mr. Lorimer to follow for a six o'clock dinner, will you not?"

Much too shy to extricate herself and her husband from the unexpected trap, Mrs. Lorimer

consented, and Beatrice having made Laura happy by asking her to come too, hurried home with them in a state of great self-complacency. "It is a bore," she thought, "but poor Helen will like some civility shown to them; and, really, after to-day there may not be one free for such a purpose; the house will be full for weeks."

"Mrs. Lorimer has kindly agreed to spend the afternoon with us, Helen," she said, aloud, as they reached the house. "Laura remembers you well, I can see." (She was kissing Helen with all the devotion of a childish admirer.) "I dare say you will want to hear all the home news, Mrs. Lorimer, so I will leave you with Miss Raymond for a little while undisturbed. There is a picture-book for you, my dear, if you like pictures; or, if you prefer it, you can run about the garden."

And so she released herself from the irksomeness of entertaining an undesired guest till nearly dinner-time. It *was* rather hard work, and Helen

perceived the difficulties on both sides; saw the subdued flutter in Mrs. Lorimer's manner so long as she tried to take part in the gay small-talk natural to Beatrice; and felt how wearily circumstantial she became in narrative or description whenever she got on more familiar ground; how needlessly she enlarged on subjects in which she was at home, till she remembered that Mrs. Chadleigh had no family, and could not be interested in them, and then abruptly stopped short for fear of doing what she had already done.

The prevailing resolve of rich people in the privileged classes, is *not* to be bored. They find bores almost the only annoyance and obstruction which neither money, nor science, nor social rank can remove; their efforts are, therefore, naturally directed to prevention by every possible check of manner and look. Yet they are bored, and grievously. The prevailing endeavour of poor companions—gently born, but hampered by mani-

fold disadvantages—is not to burden and not to bore happier ones who can afford to be fastidious. Yet they are often intolerably burdensome and boring; and more from this anxiety to avoid being so, than from any other cause. It is uneasiness which invariably annoys, and communications studiously and consciously adapted to please another person, lack the best ingredients of human intercourse.

When Mrs. Lorimer was slowly recounting to Mr. Chadleigh what the doctor said about Teddy's last attack of croup, and how he administered his remedies, she was less tedious than when she ventured upon a series of compliments on all he had done for the gardens of his tenants; and not nearly so mistaken in choice of subject as when she hazarded condolence on the trouble a drunken butler had lately caused him. She was not aware that sympathy seldom pleases, when offered by one in a position of social inferiority: it assumes something like fellowship, and en-

dangers due regard to the "icy precepts of respect." So, at least, Beatrice seemed to think, for she cut her condoling guest very short, and rose to leave the table.

And yet Mrs. Lorimer was a lady, though one little used to good society; and though Beatrice chose to speak of her defects of manner as "what one must expect in those sort of people," there was nothing seriously amiss to complain of; only such trifles as sneezing with a kind of interrogative surprise in her face, and talking of her brothers and sisters to the Chadleighs by name, as if they must know whom she meant. Helen was sorry that they did not see her at all to the best advantage: and she herself was too well aware that she was only asked for the gratification of another guest to feel for one moment more than tolerated—a feeling sure to make good its suspicions.

Children are ever welcome to grown people under any embarrassment, because the tone of

feeling they are supposed to elicit is one in which all can share, and all understand; and thus Laura was a relief to the whole party. Beatrice could show her something at another side of the room when tired of slow talk; Helen stroked her head when at a loss for something to say in answer to Mrs. Lorimer's regrets that she just missed Edwin by coming away when she did; her mother could put her hair off her face while her own was flushing up at some little awkwardness; and both the gentlemen join her on the lawn for an unbending game of croquet.

Though cousins, they seemed to be on very stiff terms with one another. Mr. Lorimer looked more worn and anxious than he had the last time Helen had seen him, and she shivered with pity while listening to Mr. Chadleigh's pressing inquiries for commissions when he went to London for a day's shopping. The rich man spoke as if good shops were the great desideratum of life: the poor man looked as if even the idea

of the least expense distressed him. Mr. Chadleigh's manner was frank and unaffectedly kind, but it failed to thaw the icy reserve of his threadbare relation; and Helen fancied she could detect in his tones the smothered but irrepressible chagrin of one who has been bound hand and foot by obligations. In the long run the most generous natures resent it, and the impossibility of ever expressing such resentment makes it worse; and the civilities of the Chadleighs had not equalled their liberalities, which might have made these last less palatable.

When that long summer evening was over, all were glad to have done with it except Laura, who had been made quite happy both by the many pretty things she had seen, and the gift of an old story-book. Mrs. Lorimer's only enjoyment had been the sight of her little girls: but Helen's gentle cordiality was a comfort, and with the indelible instincts of her earlier days, she derived much pleasure from saying to herself that she

had spent an afternoon at the Grange, and referring to it not unfrequently, when speaking to neighbours who used to inquire whether she saw much of the Chadleighs.

CHAPTER XX.

"The world, when men and women meet,
Is rich in sage remark, nor stints to strew
With roses and with myrtle fields of death."

HENRY TAYLOR.

"Die Blüthe fiel, mir blieb der scharfe Dorn,
Noch immer aus der Wunde quillt das Blut;
Es sind das Weh, die Sehnsucht und der Zorn
Mein einzig Gut.

"Und dennoch brachte man mir Lethes Fluth,
Und spräche, 'Trink, du sollst genesen sein,
Sollst fühlen, wie so sanft Vergessen thut,'
Ich sagte, Nein!

"War alles mir ein wesenloser Trug,
Er war so schön, er war so selig doch;
Ich fühl' es tief, bei jedem Athem zug,
Ich liebe doch."—E. GEIBEL.

THE following day a succession of visitors began to arrive, and for many weeks gaiety was the order of the house. Amusements of all kinds;

parties for music, dancing, boating, and archery, came quick one upon another; and in all Helen was expected to take part. Beatrice was certain that it was good for her, that she wanted rousing; and to effect this, assured her that she depended on her more brilliant powers for the entertainment of her guests. She could not refuse to do her best; and vigorously strove for social purposes to keep her spirits up to the mark; to banish all recollection of her own sorrow, and drown it as much as she could in the bright current of external mirth; but her truer self was moaning within for Arthur, and at times she could not silence its lament. A shudder ran through her often at the remembrance of her own position.

Here she was acting the part of a happy visitor among others who *had* homes to return to;—as the friend of the lady of the house, every attention was paid to her, but if her rootless, homeless position had been guessed (Beatrice was most

anxious that it never should be), how differently would she have been treated! Thus she felt like an impostor if her antecedents were not divined; and whenever they were, or she fancied that they were, another sort of shame stung her.

In other circumstances she would have felt mere poverty a trifling evil, for hers was a nature free from constitutional bondage to appearances. She had been too habitually used to what was right in appearance to mind any little external wrong as to looks; and if her heart had been satisfied, her taste would have foregone its exterior requirements cheerfully; but now because she had no home circle, no charmed presence to resort to, in which all opinions outside it are forgotten as insignificant, the want of many little luxuries began to be formidable. She had now no one whom she pleased supremely, (even in her imagination Arthur could now regard her with indifference); and she became possessed with a

new anxiety, an apprehensive wish to avoid displeasing any one. Hence the haughty stare of a noble coxcomb could chagrin her, and the surprised glances of Miss This, or Mrs. That, or any other chance companion, fill her with humiliating concern. And she was so lovely and so clever, that among Mrs. Chadleigh's visitors envious people were not wanting who secretly enjoyed disconcerting her "interesting friend," now and then.

For the most part, however, she was very popular. Few days passed without some hint from Beatrice of the admiration that seemed felt for her; or some joking recommendation not to let so-and-so slip. Such words were kindly meant; but it only woke up an old grief to hear that any one else found her "so charming," "so clever," "so delightful," when Arthur had learned to forget her. It woke up grief within, and gave caution to her manner: either by her wit, or her evident coldness, she repelled one or two whom

Beatrice had expressly invited as "marrying men," and who made no secret of the attraction they found in her friend. Beatrice saw her projects fail and was disappointed, but dared not say more about them. The colour she once saw on Helen's cheek when she had begun seriously to press the point of marriage for the sake of a home, had warned her to be very careful in giving such advice to a proud woman, and she could only sometimes venture to rally her upon being "*so difficile!*" It was very provoking to be baffled in all her schemes for making a friend happy; and some credit was due to her for the good humour with which she bore their ill success.

She was one of those women who do all the light work of affection very prettily; but though Helen felt its graceful touch soothing and pleasant, she was well aware that in reality they had little or no attachment. Their natures were worlds apart, and any change of circumstance that

would have thrown them upon each other's society and brought differing habits of thought into collision, must have proved painfully that they were not suitable friends.

Summer months glided smoothly on; it was now September. The distant view seen from Helen's window was streaked with the golden light of harvest, and against misty grey hills it shone in beautiful relief.

"Before that harvest is carried I ought to return," thought Helen one morning, as she was dressing; and as it chanced to be a day of departure for one set of visitors, before the day fixed for the others to arrive, she was able to find Beatrice alone before the post went out. Her intention of leaving was firmly announced, and as firmly and vehemently repulsed.

"I will not hear of it, my dear. Percy and I depend upon keeping you at least till after Christmas. You will go to the sea-side with us

like a good girl. I positively want you there, for he will take such long walks, and I am wretched without some one to talk to in lodgings. No thanks; you oblige me very much by staying. I cannot bear to think of your going back to those dreadful Trouncers,—such a name, too! enough to make one ill to hear it twice a-day. No, stay here, if you can be tolerably comfortable with us, a few months longer.”

Comfortable? yes; and as she heartily accepted the prolonged welcome, Helen glanced round the room where they sat. All looked so perfect in taste, so made for enjoyment. Outward comfort kills sorrow and anxiety like an opiate; long enjoyed, it lulls aspirations also. Had Beatrice any aspirations? Helen could not detect one, beyond the wish to have her friends well married, the poor people on her husband's estate contented, and all around her thriving and pleasant-looking.

What was there left to desire? Religion “and

all that sort of thing," of course ; but there was the clergyman to see to that ; and, besides, it was no use trying to make everybody serious. " There's so much cant in the world ! Percy and I never wish to encourage it."

Now, all the summer Helen had enjoyed going to see the poor people in Grailedge to whom Mr. Lorimer had directed her, more than any of the so-called pleasures from which she was seldom able to withdraw for this purpose. From the deep of her sorrow she looked into the deep of their penury and need with a mute sense of having found there something to equal it. But when she tried to give Beatrice some idea of the suffering she had witnessed in ever so mild a paraphrase, it did not do ; it evidently ruffled her composure, not to say her temper, to hear of all this disorderly pain and want. It was not to be sanctioned, according to her ideas, by too much attention ; there was *something* wrong when children cried for bread and could not get it ; she

and Mr. Chadleigh wholly disapproved of such complaints,—*she* never knew want that had not fault in it, and so on.

Helen's eye would fall to the ground while such talk went on; and while remembering all her friend's good deeds, she wondered why all sympathy seemed wanting. It was true that the Chadleighs had brought most of their tenants to that state of picturesque cottager-hood which is so pleasing to a landowner's eye, but of the worst poverty and the most wretched homes Beatrice knew nothing. All her ideas of a cottage presupposed a Bible on the shelf, a pig in the sty, a smile and a bow when ladies and gentlemen passed, and children's dresses neatly patched: of the need that hides its squalor in sullen seclusion she never dreamed. But human life is not the smoothly brushed and combed affair that such people wish to think it; there is the mystery of iniquity and the mystery of destitution close at the door of the richest and happiest, and

even they must wink hard to avoid seeing some traces of it occasionally.

That day, when Beatrice had relieved Helen's mind from the incubus fear of being soon again with her cousins, she for a moment forgot the deficiency of her nature so often felt before; and broke out into a lamentation upon the wretchedness of her estate among them.

"Ah! my dear," replied her friend, at the first decent opportunity for interruption, "it must be very bad; but we must all have our troubles. I am sure I can well imagine *yours*: what I suffer when the MacWhiddles have to be asked to spend a day here! those old Scotch friends of Percy's you have heard him speak of—dreadful creatures! tell me how to make marmalade, and offer recipes for shortcake, and are sure I should like their mode of preserving gooseberries, till I'm all but annihilated. It's no use thinking of such horrors when we haven't got to be with them. Pray try and forget the Trouncer cousins and all about

them now. I am going to have a little picnic the day after to-morrow, and I want you to come and help me choose the best place for it in Grailwood."

END OF VOL. II.

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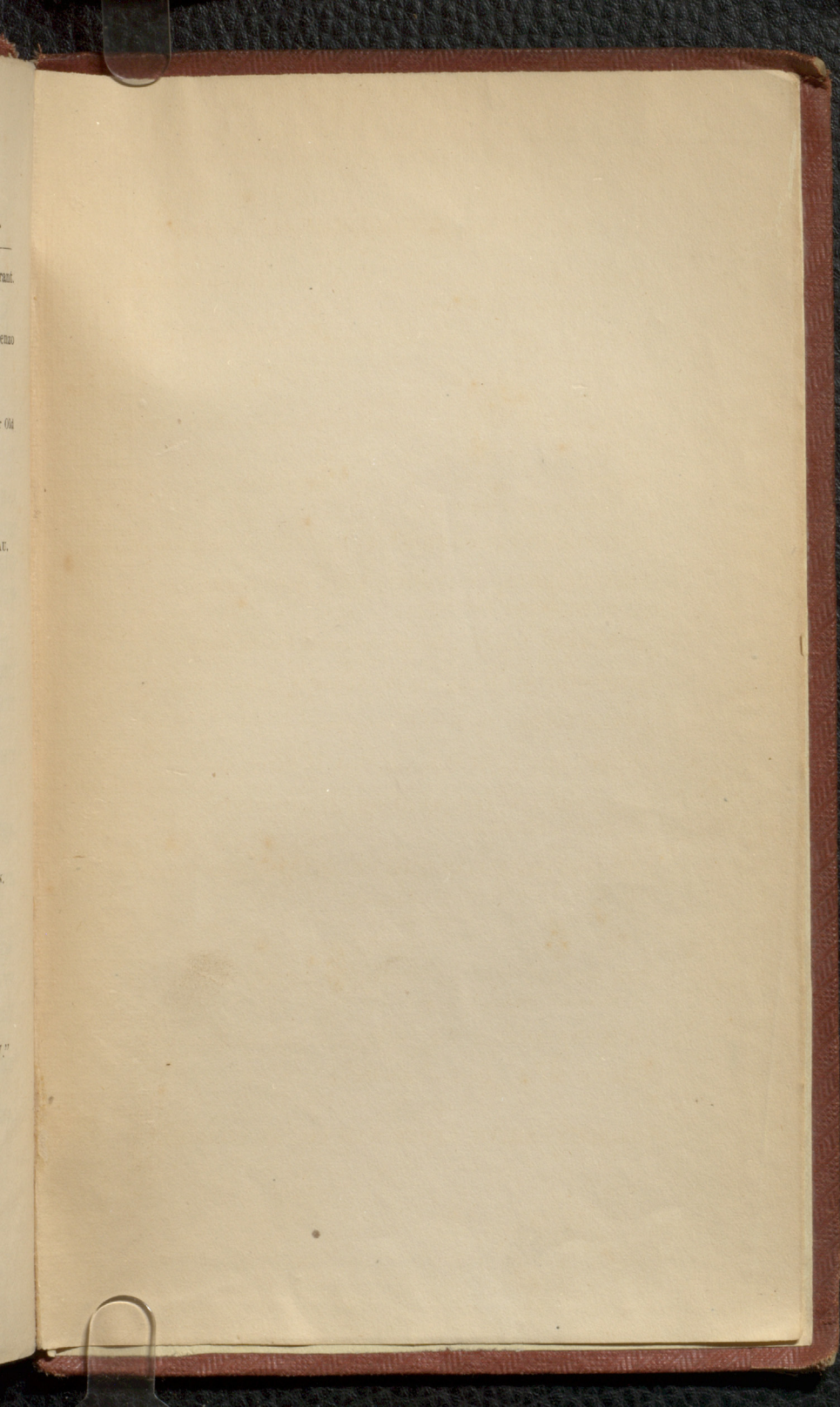
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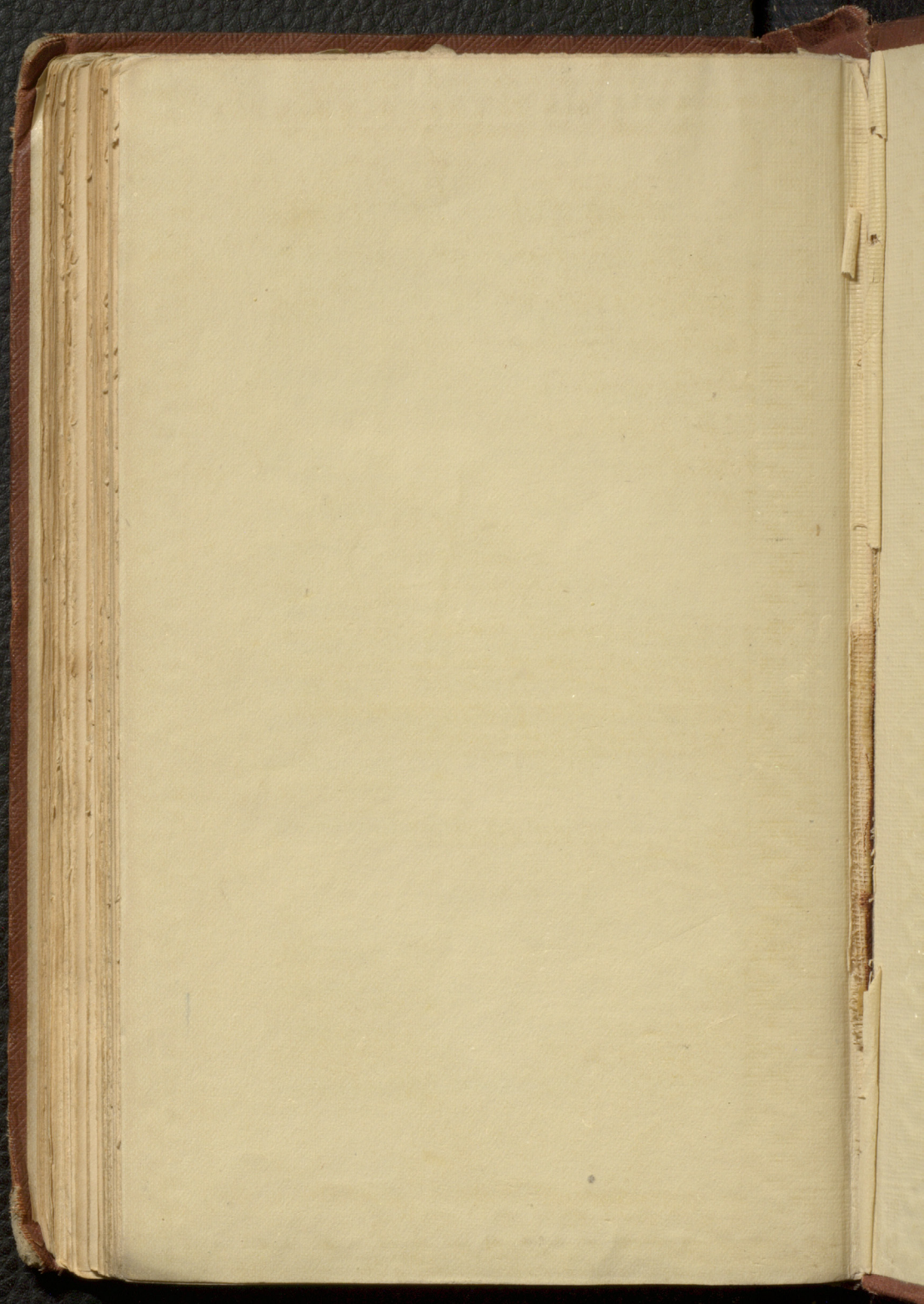
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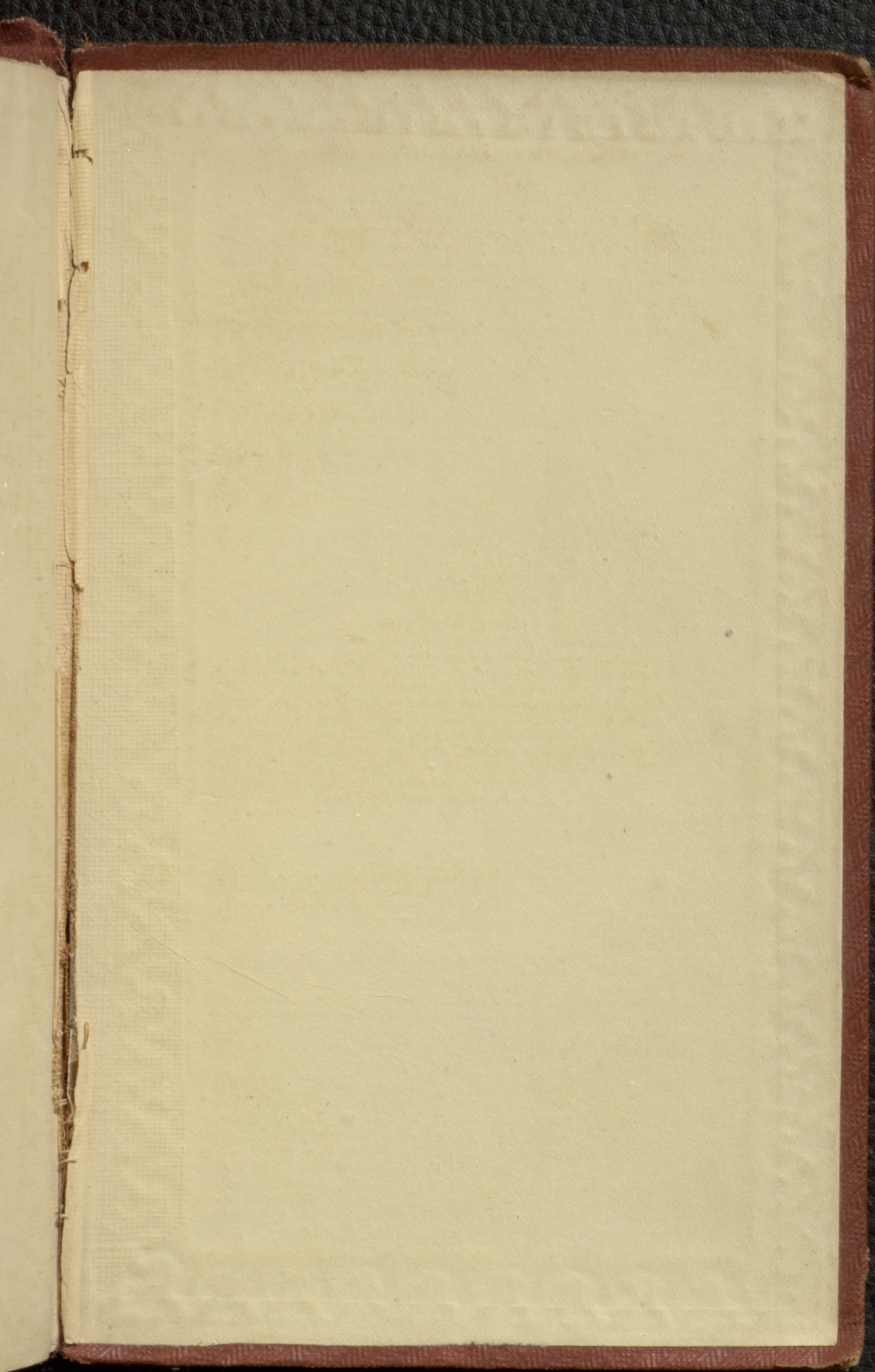
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